

SATAN IS MY ALLY—No Grave Could Hold Him

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SCIENCE - FICTION

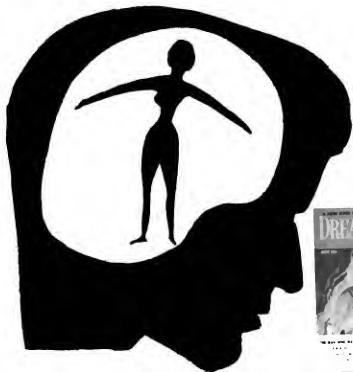
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MAY 1957 VOL. 6 NO. 4





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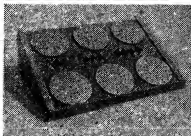
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BY THE EDITOR

**WITHIN SIXTY MILES OF TIMES SQUARE, N. Y., YOU
CAN FIND—**

—areas so remote and inaccessible that the last visitors were Indians, long before the Dutch arrived; rocks that have not been disturbed since the Ice Age; trees older than the Declaration of Independence.

—children who never saw a radio, much less a television set; who are completely illiterate and will remain so.

—adults who have never ridden in an automobile; who have never heard of the atom bomb, Eisenhower, or the Hit Parade.

—modern villages where wild deer enter homes through open doors and eat leaves off house plants; where house cats get chummy with raccoons, and even skunks.

—places where badgers will step out into the road and fight oncoming trucks. (They never win but they keep trying.)

—places where wild dog packs are such a menace as to bring complaints from citizens who are afraid to let their small children play outdoors.

All of which proves what New York City really is—a big country town.

This editor has been presented with something every gambler should have—a sure-fire, absolute, never-failing method for winning money at roulette. It's based upon some real tricky mathematical progressions. While I'm not a gambler I am interested in mathematics, so I bought a toy roulette wheel and with the assistance of the good wife (who wouldn't know gambling fever from a bad cold) I spent a couple of evenings testing the system. Mastering the technique is not too diffi-

(Continued on page 130)

SATAN IS MY ALLY

By HARLAN ELLISON

Looking for a shortcut to success? It's very simple. The Black Prince is waiting to push you right to the top. There's a small price for his dark services—but we won't talk about that.

THE gentleman with the red-veined, bulbous nose came to Paul Dane in a highly theatrical manner.

As the elevator carried him down through his apartment building, Dane began to get the impression that they had gone perhaps ten or twelve floors beyond his own. Which was highly alarming, for the Dane apartment was on the fifth floor. Yet the elevator, beginning to reek of bad axle grease, sped ever downward, downward, till Paul Dane found the temperature climbing with terrifying steadiness.

Dane pulled at the four-in-hand knot of his rep tie, un-



Cruelty, evil, and desecration



were the hideous postulates of the Beast on the throne

buttoned his charcoal-gray jacket. Finally, as the walls of the elevator heated till the wood panels began to smoke, Dane opened his shirt, pulling the tie askew.

The elevator had been going down, down, down for ten minutes, and Dane's attaché case had long since slid from his sweating hand. Worries about being late to the office left him, thoughts of turning the knife in old Quimby's back faded. Now only the stark terror of an elevator that continued down far past the bore of its shaft, enmeshed him in white-hot fear. Whatever was happening, and he could not deny its happening, was something beyond his ken.

Paul Dane shivered, amidst the stifling heat.

The elevator stopped.

It bounced to a halt, making his ears pop, making his knees sag, making the sweat pour out on him more fully. The wooden walls of the inner elevator were charred. Smoke curled around the door's edge and out of the ventilator slots in the walls. Paul Dane shoved at the door, which had remained steadfastly closed, but it would not budge. He found his fright a living thing. Trapped in a smoking elevator, far down below the

level of the city. What was happening? Was he going mad?

Then the vein-nosed man stepped through the wall.

He was perhaps six feet tall, with black hair, tastefully snowy at the temples, and brushed back smoothly without pomp or pompadour. His suit was a meticulously fitted charcoal-gray very much like Dane's own. The man was of an indefinite age, somewhere between thirty-eight and fifty, Dane estimated. The face was a long, thin one, with high, highlighted cheekbones and skin drawn tightly over those cheekbones. The eyes were flat and almost lustreless . . . a sort of unreflective black. The only incongruity was the gigantic nose, quite completely covered with the tracery of blue and scarlet veins.

"Well. I see you've come dressed for the occasion," the man said to Paul Dane.

Dane was at a loss for only a moment. He straightened the tie, and began to pull it tight. He drew himself up, and approached the man another step.

Then he suddenly realized the man had not come through an *open* door, he had walked through a *closed* door! He had, to be precise, walked directly through solid matter.

Dane retreated the step he had just taken.

His voice was low, awed, frightened. Strange tones from Paul Dane, who had never feared or been awed by anything. "Wh-who *are* you? Wh-where am I?"

The man smiled unpleasantly. It was a toothy smile. "In reverse order, you are in Hell, Mr. Dane. And I, your host, your kind and willing, your most obedient servant, Satan."

Paul Dane felt his liver and innards freeze over. He felt an unquestionable truth slide through him. He felt his brain catch fire and char and smoke and burn and turn to wet ash in his head. He *was* in Hell. *Look at the man!* Could there be any fraction of a doubt that this was the Prince of Darkness before him.

All doubt vanished, and Paul Dane felt like sinking to his knees, to ask deliverance. But he had never appealed to the Above in his life, and now, now when he needed the hosts of Above so desperately, he was doomed.

Heaven and Paul Dane were strangers.

"Yes, isn't that so, Mr. Dane, always when you need them?" The man agreed, as though reading Dane's

thoughts. "But then, that is why I'm still in business, you see. They go too much on personal faith and initiative up there. They fail to realize that the good manufacturer brings his product to the attention of the consumer . . . doesn't wait for the consumer to come to him. Advertising, you might say. That's why my trade is always such a flowing, constant one."

Dane was tongue-tied. What could one say to Satan?

"Well, Mr. Dane, shall we get right to it?"

Satan smiled, and snapped his manicured fingers. Two well-padded modern contour chairs appeared in the elevator. The Prince of Darkness sank into one with a sigh, brought his feet up onto the footrest, indicated the other for Dane. The amazed human slumped slowly onto his own chair, noting wildly that Satan seemed to have perfectly normal feet, not hooves, as he had always believed. Unless the dully-polished cordovan shoes had been specially-made to permit entry of split hooves.

"As I said, shall we get right down to it . . . I believe *down* is an appropriately-chosen word, don't you?"

Dane nodded, despite himself.

"Well, then," Satan began. "A brief explanation first, then to the reason for this discussion.

"First of all, Mr. Dane. I have had my eyes on you for quite some time. You are perhaps the most worthy applicant for my realm I have encountered in the past three hundred years, with the possible exception of a Mr. Schikelgruber, who was almost too much even for me.

"I have watched your rise in the business world—a marvelous bit of strategy taking over your employer's post at Davisson Sheet Metal. Unfortunate he had to pass away so soon after your coup. There was room there for any number of exquisite tortures. But that's in the past, eh?" He seemed jovial, pleased at Dane's ruthless machinations.

"But," he continued, a bit sadly, "you are not now fulfilling your potential, Mr. Dane. I've expected big things from you, and you've, well, I hate to say this, but you've slacked off considerably.

"Now I've called you down here today, to discuss a certain operation I've been waiting to initiate. And I think," he beamed, and looked as though he wanted to clap Dane on the shoulder—which Dane fervently hoped he

would not do—"I think you are the man to carry the ball.

"Now. Let's—as they say in the advertising game—let's plop it into a labyrinth and see if it can find its way out."

Dane found his voice. "Wh-wh-how did you get me down here? I'm dead, aren't I?"

Satan steepled his fingers, smiled condescendingly. "Mr. Dane, you expected to see me with a tail and hooves and horns, didn't you? Yes, I can see you did. Or you were impressed by all the modern writers who put me in any manner of outlandish costume, eh? Well, let's face it . . . a modern business must wear modern garb. But underneath, the stand is still the same."

"I wear the clothes of the day—and frankly find them a great deal more comfortable than cape and bodkin—but my business is damnation. You are not dead, but," his tone was sharp, leaving no room for mercy, "you now hang in the balance. Frankly, you have no real choice in what I am about to offer. I just feel it's always best to talk things over with my employees before getting them to follow my orders. Makes for a more equitable business relationship. But if you show

the slightest hesitancy, you will be dead, as of that moment, and condemned to my domain as the lowest sulphur-pit bather of them all.

"On the other hand, if you cooperate, there might, I say *might*, be an executive position down here, when your time arrives. I have the power of life and death over you, Mr. Dane.

"Are you ready to listen to my proposition?"

Paul Dane's reply was a silent one, but the one Satan had anticipated. He listened attentively.

"First of all, I want you to sever all relations with your business—which I believe is still controlled in part by Mr. Davisson's widow—and your wife. I want you to separate yourself from all ties, and go out to California, where you will join the group known as the Resurrectionists.

"The cult is ruled over by a slightly mad fanatic named Father Respect, but I hope that in short order you will put him out of the way. Then I want you to build up the ranks of the group along the lines indicated in this brochure I've had my research section draw up." He fished in an inside pocket and brought out a folded sheaf of papers. He held them out to Dane.

Paul Dane took them, and felt the tingling warmth that passed up his arm. He held them loosely, and listened, mesmerized.

Satan continued, "I want you to build up the Resurrectionists on a platform of black masses, orgies, devil worship, and—pardon my egotism in using this term—Satanism.

"For every member you get into the proper frame of corruption and decadence, you will be lifted a level in my domain. I might add my domain is many, many, many-levelled. Each one you win, will be taken to me after death. Which will, of course, be arranged by you."

"But," Dane interrupted, without meaning to do so, "how can they be damned just by joining the cult?"

Satan took no anger. It had been a reasonably logical question. He smiled tolerantly, replied, "Aren't you aware, Mr. Dane, that the sins of the soul are far more damaging than those of the action? Every time they impart a bit of faith in your black worship, yes indeed, they are ripening themselves for me."

He rubbed his hands together, swung his legs off the chair. "You will find in that brochure all the data you

need, and a complete list of your new powers, to aid you. Oh, yes, you have any number of eye-opening new attributes.

"The only thing I must warn you about—my historical section tells me this is the only pitfall—is the attention of a good woman. If a good woman finds you out, and labels you what you are, then the show is up, I'm afraid. But perspicacity on your part should keep any such away from your operation."

Dane had many questions, but he had a feeling they would all be adequately—*more* than adequately—answered in the brochure. And strangely, he felt no qualms about his new assignment. Yes, assignment. He realized, for the first time in his life, that he had been working for the devil's ends all his days.

"Well, Mr. Dane, what is your answer?" The devil's eyes had lost the flat paint stare. They were burning. Two red-hot, bottomless pools of indescribable hell, brimming over with an unrestrained anxiety to forego all the other souls he might gain for torment, and suck this one, handy, creature down immediately.

Dane answered, "I—I'll accept. I'll s-start right now, immediately."

The fires died away, and the flat, dead stare returned. Satan was pleased, and yet disappointed. There were handicaps to being a demon. It got habit-forming, to the point of pleasure for the moment cancelling out the good of the Long View. But he smiled.

"Good. Good. And don't forget, Mr. Dane, I'm your ally. A much handier ally than My Rival." He turned his flat black eyes above, and a strange, unpleasant look crossed his smooth features.

He extended his hand to shake Dane's, but the human drew back. "Oh, well," Satan passed it off, "no matter. Our bargain is sealed on a much more primary level, Mr. Dane. *Au revoir*." And he was gone, and the chairs were gone, and the smoke was gone and the heat was gone, as the elevator rose rapidly, smoothly.

A few moments later, it had stopped, and the door opened on the first floor of Paul Dane's apartment house. A woman waited for the elevator. Her manner was irritated, and she pursed her lips impatiently.

Was it all a dream? No, it wasn't. He could feel the tingle of the devil's brochure in his hand. Dane retrieved his

attaché case, and strode out of the elevator. The woman passed him, muttering, "People who hold these elevators. Ought to be a law against them! And phew! the stench. What was he doing, cooking in here?"

The elevator door closed, and started the machine up.

Dane stood and watched the indicator rise, and thought of what had happened. He had taken the longest, most fearful ride *that* elevator would ever travel.

He left the building, hailing a taxi, eager to start his new venture. All day he had one problem—a smell of rotten eggs that followed him.

At the office, each secretary greeted him. Particularly Helen Ralph. He had been betraying her for over three months now, without her knowing she was just another toy, and the look of pure love in her deep blue eyes was laughable to Paul Dane. He walked past her without a word, and motioned to old Miss Uris and Henry Tracy, whose desks were close together in the accounting department. He motioned them to follow him to his office.

He had known for quite some time that they had been living together, unwed for one

reason and another, primarily because old Tracy had a lousy heart and was afraid he'd kick off any minute, and so would not allow wrinkled Miss Uris to marry him. He had often wondered about their relationships, whether it was on more than a social level; but he had never done anything about it, mostly because there was no benefit in breaking it up. As long as they lived together, and shared the coffee tin, they seemed to be happy. And as long as they were happy, they got their work done, which was fine for Paul Dane, as executive manager of Davisson Sheet Metal.

But now he was starting a new assignment, and he was going to make his last day here a memorable one.

They followed him to his pine-paneled office with fear and trepidation written large on their humdrum faces. The fear of the employee for the boss. Dane wasted no time. He hung his hat on the tree, slammed his case down on the desk, and said, "How long have you two tramps been carrying on with one another?"

His tone was so violent, his accusation so crudely put, his meaning so clear, wrinkled Miss Uris with the flat chest

and the gray hair and the bifocals, burst into tears. Tracy flamed at the hairline for an instant, then took a protective step toward his woman. Dane stopped him roughly.

"Stand where you are when I'm talking to you, you miserable lecher!"

Tracy's face whitened, and his hands clenched tightly. His eyes bulged for a moment, and he tried to speak. Beside him Miss Uris moaned softly, dug a hankie from her sleeve, and began daubing at her eyes with it. Dane continued, terribly, inexorably.

"Well, listen, you two disgusting free-lovers! You're fired. The both of you. Dead cold fired! And you'll get two weeks' salary, and that's all. And I'm making certain every other concern in town knows what you are. You'll never work again!"

He never had a chance to add a sentence, for Henry Tracy gagged, and choked, and purpled, and fell dead of a stroke at Miss Uris's feet. His head struck the desk on the way down, but there was no blood. He was dead before he struck the thick pile carpet.

They took her away with screams and kicks, but she was done for, also. Dane went on with his plan.

He called in Morganroth Jennings, the head accountant, who had been embezzling insignificant amounts from the petty cash boxes, and said, "I'm not going to call the cops on you, Jennings. That would be too simple. I'm calling the dean of your son's university, and I'm going to tell him that the boy's tuition was paid for out of embezzled funds. I'm going to make certain the boy is disgraced and thrown out of school. Then I'll have him hounded. I can do it, too, because Davisson's has contributed substantially to that university's gymnasium project. He'll die a bum . . . just as you will!"

The accountant had leaped across the desk, then, and tried to kill Dane, but somehow a wall invisible had reared up between him and Dane. He continued to claw at the wall, and scream and froth and swear he would see Dane dead, and that Dane was a madman and a devil, and he would get even . . . while the three men from Shipping carted the embezzler off the grounds, throwing him into the street.

Then Dane made the rounds of the file clerks and secretaries, who had been carrying on minor intrigues. Wasting time at the water cooler.

Stealing office supplies. Fired! Fired all of them! Then he went in to find Davisson's widow.

He walked down the long carpeted hall to the main office where she sat as a solid figure-head, though he ran the plant. He pulled his trump card.

"Emily, you're going to the gas chamber."

She knew what he meant and her stolid nature broke immediately. They had planned the death of Old Man Davisson together. She had promised him control of the plant, in exchange for freedom from her husband, whom she despised. He had done it cleverly, and their relationship had been one of quiet avoidance for the three years since Dane had taken over Davisson Sheet Metal.

"I've planted new evidence that can't help but be found, Emily, to prove you—and *you alone*—brained Charlie. When they get the phone call I'll make in five minutes, they'll come and get you, and you'll strangle on the gas."

He turned and stalked back to his office, before she could plead with him. He heard the pistol shot, just as he was opening his office door. He did not bother to make the call.

Now it was done. He was free of Davisson Sheet Metal.

Adroit manipulations of the books—with the blame put on Morganroth Jennings—netted him forty thousand dollars, and he was free to leave, after writing his resignation from a firm as corrupt and rotten inside as Davisson Sheet Metal.

He walked away from the factory a free man . . . except for his wife . . . a man able to start with a clear mind, his new job.

After the coroner's inquest—his wife Helen had fallen from their fifth floor window and impaled herself on the tall spear-tipped steel fence. Paul Dane made certain she got a decent burial, poor woman, and went home to pack for California.

When he unlocked his apartment door, he could smell Helen Ralph's *Shalimar* perfume in the living room. His forehead creased in annoyance at this brief interruption of his schedule, but he squared his solid shoulders, and walked in calmly.

She was sitting on the sofa, her legs crossed high. It had been those slim legs, and her trim well-kept looks that had attracted him. But she was worn away in his thoughts—not that affection had ever entered into it—and he wished

she were far away. Had this been a fresh time, and not the end of a period in which so many acquaintances of his had died, he might have put her away for good, but she was safe for that reason.

She rose to kiss him. He turned away from her, and went to the bar. As he mixed a drink, he could feel her warm hands running over his back. Dane whirled on her, and his hand came out in a vicious arc. The slap echoed around the room. An angry welt bloomed on her smooth cheek.

She fell back in pain and astonishment. The man she loved had struck her. His face was not the brown-eyed handsome face she knew. It was as if . . . as if . . . he had the very *devil* in him. She put the thought from her mind, would not acknowledge, even recognize it. He was Paul Dane, and he was in sorrow, for his wife had died—even though the woman had never understood Paul; hadn't he told her that many times?—and he needed care and affection.

"Paul," she began softly, "we can go away now. We can be married, just as you said. We can . . ."

This time he struck her with a doubled fist, and she

fell against the sofa, her skirt in disarray. Then he walked over and calmly poured the reeking highball over her. His hand came down and tangled in her honey-blond hair and he dragged her erect with the scream bubbling from her throat.

His blows were vicious, and in a moment she was in tears. Then he ripped the front of her dress down, and yelled: "*Slut!*" in her face.

She made a struggle as he forced her to the door, and as he pitched her into the hall, as she struck the opposite wall with violence, he heard her murmur with agony, "I don't care. I—just—don't—care. I'll follow you, Paul. I love you. I'll find you wherever you are, and win back your love—your love . . ."

He slammed the door, double-locked it, slipped the chain, and began to pack. California called—and the devil's work.

Somewhere just beside his right ear, he seemed to hear the soothing, reassuring words of a sibilant tone: "Fine. Fine work, Mr. Dane. You're doing excellently. My stock is on the rise already. Don't forget, we're partners in this, and you can always count on me."

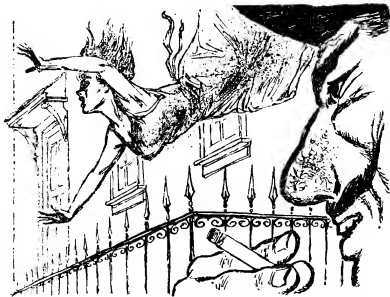
Using Satan's brochure, Dane insinuated himself into

the Southern California cult of the Resurrectionists. "Doctor" Theobald Fardy had started the group some eight years before, more as a con game and faith-healing dodge than anything else. There had been the usual period of gathering rich hypochondriacs and indolent millionairesses to the fold, with promises of Great Revelations, Life-After-Death, The True Way and Companionship with the Eternities. Things had gone well.

After the usual insolence of

the police and Better Business Bureau, the good Doctor (whose degrees were always out being re-photostated) had buttressed himself with many wealthy supporters whose influence could turn aside *any* investigations, and had started to rake in the take.

Dane was surprised to find, once he had joined—made himself Chief Acolyte, that Fardy was not really doing anyone any harm. In point of fact, he was bolstering weak characters and confidences,



Her scream of terror echoed while the Devil watched in glee.

and soundly investing some of his followers' money. With the gigantic interest and margin profits going into the Doctor's coffers.

It was a good structure to take over, though, and Dane began doing just that. Until the night Fardy took a stand.

"You've been promising them immortality!" he stormed, his little belly flopping. Dane looked up from the typewriter on which he had been writing a pamphlet intended to inflame prospective members.

"Yes, Doctor, that's true. And I can deliver. Which is more than can be said for you."

Fardy exploded. He stormed and raged and banged his fists on the desk, till Dane's papers scattered to the floor. That made Paul Dane angry. And then Doctor Fardy belted, "Get out! Get away from here or I'll have them crucify you!"

So it became necessary for Paul Dane, Chief Acolyte of the Resurrectionists, to cave in the front of the good Doctor's head with a heavy ornamental brass statue.

Dane buried him in a grove of orange trees eighty-five miles away, and went back to the Mystical Prayer House to prepare an announcement to

his followers that now *he* was the Great Resurrector, and that Doctor Fardy had gone away to examine the potentialities of the Forever.

All too true.

Now in complete control. Dane went to work. He called his cultists into conclave.

The newspaper announcements had brought them running, all right. Dane stared out at the throng that filled Hollywood Bowl. Not just cultists either, but scientists and clergymen and newspapermen and housewives and wealthy scions of business. Thousands of them.

He chuckled to himself and drew the scrap of newspaper from his jacket pocket. It was the advertisement from the *San Francisco Blade*. It was a tasteful layout, but one calculated to draw even the most skeptical. He read it over again, reveling in its phraseology, taken directly from the devil's brochure:

NO FAKE

LIFE AFTER DEATH FOR YOU

Tonight, at the Hollywood Bowl, proof will be offered to all scientists, to men and women of all faiths, and to clergy wishing to discover the truth of Resurrection. Find out for yourself. The most doubt-

ing will be convinced. No obligation, no charges, no collections. Come and see.

TONIGHT 8:00
THE RESURRECTIONISTS
PROOF!

He peered through the slit in the curtain again, folding the clipping into his pocket. The place was bright with lights, and bright with the faces of those who believed . . . those who would all too soon be screaming in the eternal damnation of Satan's hellfire. The dark storms that were the faces of skeptics would soon be gone; gone in the light of what they could see.

He turned away from the throng, and went back to his dressing room. He stared at himself in the mirror. This was something new for Paul Dane. He found a heady excitement in being the devil's ally. His life, from the day he had slashed a neighbor's dog's throat, to the day he had murdered Doctor Theobold Fardy, was a progression of acts designed to ingratiate himself with the Prince of Darkness. He had never known this, consciously, but there is a wind that blows men, sending them the way the eternities wish

them to go. And Paul Dane's way was the devil's way.

Now that he had found it he was happy to do the devil's work. It seemed the perfect life—damning other men to Hell!

He stared at himself coolly. A handsome man, a man to do the job. A personable man, with that particular sort of face that instills confidence. Just enough unevenness to the jawline to be ruggedly unhandsome, but still with a brown-eyed, dark-haired appearance that attracted. He was tall, and square-shouldered. When he said something, it was not doubted, for he seemed to be a man who would not lie.

Why should he lie? Evil is occasionally so pure in its rottenness it needs no lies. This was Paul Dane's conviction. Strength came directly from below.

Another reflection appeared in the mirror.

Helen.

He spun, saw her face turn white as the full fury of his eyes beat against her awareness. For an instant he thought she saw through him, saw what he *really* was, and Satan's words came back to his mind strongly: *If a good woman finds you out, and*

labels you what you are, then the show is up . . .

He stared at the beautiful blonde woman before him, and knew at once she was not of that type he had to fear. He had been carrying on with her long enough to know her sins were many. But she *was* a nuisance.

"How did you find me?" His voice was hard, cold.

She moved a step closer, and love shone in her face as though it had been recently scrubbed pink with adoration. "I've followed your career out here in the newspapers. They ran your picture many times. I was in town when I saw the notice of your exhibition tonight—"

He cut her off. "Go away from me. *Don't ever let me see you again.*"

She took a step backward, and he saw the mesage that her lips would not form. She would never let him alone. She would follow him, and no matter how much evil he did her short of killing her she would dog his steps.

"I love you," she said softly, then she was gone, and they were calling him to the stage of the Hollywood Bowl. Where he would prove to the world that there *was* life after death. He was about to die . . . and be re-born.

The gunman had been hired directly off the Los Angeles Police rifle and pistol range. He was an officer of twenty years' standing, and his credentials were blown up, flashed on a giant screen on the stage. When Paul Dane walked out, calm and smooth in his charcoal-gray suit, there was muted wonder in the audience. Was this the man? Was this to be a magic show? A faith meeting? What?

Dane stepped to the thin-prong microphone and said. "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, assembled notables. This evening I intend to show you something. I will tell you nothing more than that life after death is within the reach of all of you. I ask no one to take this on my word. I ask none of you to buy or try to join *anything*, even after I have proved it to you.

"And prove it I shall, believe me, ladies and gentlemen."

The buzzing that had run through their ranks built to a crescendo. A scream from some quack or fanatic near the center of the horde reached out at Dane but he did not let it ruffle him; anyone like that was probably already damned . . . they needed no help from the Resurrectionists.

Dane lifted the mike from its stand, walked down the steps into the audience. He spoke softly.

"I would like two people from the audience. Two people who are able to prove that they are in no way connected with me, or have ever seen me before."

Hands went up, of course, and Dane was not too careful who he selected, for this was a minor part of the overall effect. These two would be added to the panel of observers merely for crowd identification. They were there for the "common touch."

He selected a fat housewife with three children, from Catalina Island, and a railroad conductor. He brought them up to the stage, and had them undergo lie detector tests, supervised by three accredited members of the Los Angeles branch of the FBI. Then he pulled his final card, to assure the audience that what was to happen was on-the-level.

He called the other members of the observers panel. The senior and junior senators from California; the Mayor of Los Angeles; three Generals and an Admiral; two well-known movie stars; two writers of contemporary novels, known for the truth of

their reporting. Each of these men had come to the exhibition of their own volition. Added volition had come from Satan, of course, who had stimulated those ever-tiniest areas of each man's brain, causing him to accept the invitation extended.

Unimpeachable authorities all.

Paul Dane in turn introduced each person, and the applause was mixed with wonder. *Could* this man be a charlatan, who had such men as witnesses?

Then Dane brought forward the Police gunman. He held a .32 Police Special in his thick hand, and he stared with worry at Paul Dane, who had not yet told him what he was to do.

Dane stuck the mike back into its stand, and removed his jacket, handing it to an usher at the side of the huge stage. Then he undid his tie, unbuttoned his shirt, and removed his undershirt. He stood there naked to the waist.

"Ladies and gentlemen, what you are about to see is no fakery. It is living—or *dying*—proof that life after death is possible.

"I will be shot six times through the heart by this police officer, and I will be

buried tonight. Tomorrow, I will rise from my grave. When I am dead, any doctors in the audience may examine me. I have already contacted ten doctors from ten different hospitals in this state, and they are present to authorize my death. The bullets are at this moment being examined by the head of the Los Angeles branch of the FBI, the Chief of Police of Los Angeles, and those two notable Generals to whom you were introduced."

He paused and turned to the men who had been examining the .32 rounds.

"Well, gentlemen?"

They concurred. The ammunition was real. Anyone hit by the bullets would surely die. They made tentative moves to stop the demonstration. Satan intervened invisibly; their words died on their lips, they shrugged their shoulders, they moved back with the other observers.

"Ladies, gentlemen," Dane concluded, "see what happens, and judge for yourselves. Then be at Everdale Cemetery, tomorrow at high noon, when I shall rise from the dead. I make no claims to godhood or priesthood. I only offer you immortality, rebirth, life after death. See . . . and believe!"

He turned his chest to the police officer.

The man raised the gun, though his hand was not controlling it. The man's will was against this. He had never shot an innocent man. A lawbreaker, perhaps, though wounding the man was more like it, but this . . .

"I—I can't," he began.

Then Satan aided his employee.

The gun went off six times. Six small round red wet holes appeared in the tanned flesh of Paul Dane.

He gave a strangled little cry, hoped to Satan that Satan himself was on the level, and dropped dead on the stage.

It was a sensational act.

The cemetery was blanketed by a dismal slanting-gray drizzle of rain. The huge throng that waited around Paul Dane's grave was obscured beneath the circular pointed ceiling of umbrellas, black and waiting. They stood huddled, waiting for the impossible.

The usual practice of waiting six months before placing a tombstone—so the ground could settle—had been circumvented, and the ornate marble headstone reared white as bleached bone in the rain.

PAUL DANE

BORN JANUARY 2, 1924

DIED AUGUST 19, 1956

HE WILL RISE

One of the huddled forms in black was a woman with blonde hair, and long legs. Helen Ralph wore a heavy black veil. She wanted desperately to be near his grave; he had gone so quickly, before she could get to the stage. Now he was dead. Now he was gone. The heaviness in her was almost something alive. Though Paul had been evil . . . she was no fool and had known this—she had loved him, truly loved him, and now it was hopeless.

There was nothing left but to be a shadow among all these shadows, waiting for some strange, unbelievable thing to occur.

She had never believed in the impossible, and she knew he was gone. Yet, Paul Dane had never been a fool. Was there something to this . . . ?

"Aaaaaaaaargh!"

The woman nearest the grave. Her scream rose like a full-plumed dark bird, rising to the sky before descending the final way to death. It rose and circled the cemetery, and the crowd pressed in.

Helen Ralph shoved and elbowed her way forward, ruthlessly, frantically. Was it possible, was it happening? Her call to God was from the heart, and as she broke past the inner ring—now drawing back, terror written on their white faces—she knew it was true.

A whitish hand, thin and bony, hairy and gnarled, was rising from the grave. The ground broke, and rose up like a tiny volcano. The bits of ground tumbled away down the slight incline, and then the shoulder came out. The hand was gripping, clutching at air, trying frantically to find something to hold. The fingers fisted, and then opened, as though the *thing* that was coming up from below was in the final stages of asphyxiation.

Then the torso began to emerge, white and bony.

Then the head.

Helen Ralph screamed and fell to the rain-soaked ground.

The process was complete. The photographs had shown him immediately after returning from the moist grave, and they showed him three hours later. His body had filled out, his skin had darkened, he was perfectly normal.

Doctors came from Johns

Hopkins and Columbia Medical School, from every hospital that had any claim to fame. Specialists were winging in from Paris, from Ankara, from Rome. But there was no contesting it—and had there been, Satan would have dulled the queries—Paul Dane had been shot dead before thousands of observers, and been reborn before hundreds. But thousands saw him two days later on a special, nationwide TV broadcast, where he made the devil's pitch. Perhaps millions.

"I offer no one anything. I make no promises. I can only say that I have found life after death, and if anyone wishes to come to the Mystic Prayer House of the Resurrectionists, I will show you what I have seen, and teach you what I know . . . and what is mine, will be yours."

Then he stepped forward, and gave them the most fantastic message of all. The one guaranteed to convince the last, most skeptical person watching.

Paul Dane said, "For I am ten thousand years old."

After the verifications offered by celebrities whose words could *not* be doubted, this was the final chill to be added.

The next weeks were crowded for Paul Dane, as

thousands flocked to the nightly workshops of the Resurrectionists.

The lights were dim, and the red flicker of the giant cremation urns was a ragged, bloody quartet of shimmering along the walls. The long black onyx-cool hall was silent but for the muted words of the devil-worshippers.

"Arla tyle nla-ratep. Kasa-sa mneo lool naydor chase. Benema - benema - benema - benema . . ."

The chant went on and on, as they writhed across the floor, raising their arms to the devil, calling him to them. Then the girl came from the doorway behind the veils. Young and vibrant.

One of the worshippers rose, and threw off his black cloak. His body shone wild and bright in the light of the urns. His eyes were wide and his mouth formed muted obscenities as he rose high on his toes, and raised the knife and slashed at the vibrant air. The girl watched with fright, and as two other worshippers rose from the group, came to her, and untied her white robe, she stifled a moan.

They slipped the robe from her lithe young body, and led her up the onyx steps to the ceremonial deck of the urn.

The chant rose higher and higher, swirling round and round like a brush fire burning, burning, burning . . .

The girl stood trembling, hands clasped together, as strange music joined the chant. Huge idols, statues of the devil, hand-carved from black woods and black stones, stood with eyes malevolent, and horns aprick, as the oiled man approached, dancing a weird, orgiastic dance.

Then, suddenly, she cried aloud. "No! No! I don't care what happens after! I don't want to die! No!"

She struggled, and writhed, but she was held fast, and now the oiled man was moving up the stairs—now he was before her—now he was chanting the oaths of the Black Mass. The knife was raised and slashed downward, and the body was raised in the arms of the man.

The chants were stronger, praying, swaying, calling, pleading with the essence of the devil to come! Now! Here! Claim us, oh, Prince of Forever! Claim us, oh, Satan, father of all Eternities!

And then—

He was there. Standing, watching all, wearing his traditional garb, with his tail flicking viciously, and his claws extended over his head

as his arms rose, and his horns stood forth.

They were frozen, for they had not quite believed this. They had committed the vilest sins of all, the most disgusting and damning sins that can be committed, but this was not of their world.

The devil stared for a moment, then turned to one of the hooded figures. "Well done, Paul Dane. This batch is better than the others. Your levels rise.

"These are the finest of the fine!

"*Come, my children!*" he roared, and the crack of doom split down the room, and when the lightning dimmed, and the Earth ceased its convulsions, and the sulphurous smell had dulled, Paul Dane stood up and pushed back his hood. He lit a filter tip cigarette and puffed deeply. It was a good day's haul.

And tomorrow was another day.

He would have to turn on the air conditioners, though. The stink of hell was in the place.

There were, of course, continuing nuisances. Every other week or so, Paul Dane had to undergo the annoyance of dying. He had to continue to convince the people. There

were ways of hiding the missing persons. They had left town, or they had died and were in the limbo state before being re-born, or they were meditating in the Mystic Prayer House. But there was no way to instigate faith where there was no faith. So he had to re-perform the death exhibition from the Bowl. He did it nobly, and he did it without weariness, for each soul that went to Hell, was another level he rose. Was there perhaps a chance he could level himself up out of Hades, and stay on Earth forever? Was immortality within his reach? He reveled in the thought.

So he died every few weeks.

It was late November when Helen Ralph smuggled herself into the orgy. He did not know she was there, and she was gone—sick in mind and body at what she had seen—before Satan arrived. But she saw, and she knew, and she knew what she must do.

So when Paul Dane died on December 2, 1956, she was prepared. She did not know what it might prove, but it was to be telecast coast-to-coast, and she had to do what she could. For the Paul Dane she knew was no longer living. This was another Paul Dane. Completely evil, com-

pletely damned, and the most devilish man on Earth.

She prepared herself.

The cameras were trained on the tombstone for a moment. It was a short block, laid horizontal, with a larger rectangle set vertically on it. Atop it, scrollwork came from the edges to meet at a cross that rose toward the night. That had been a problem, but Dane had had no religion—none at all, not even the religion of Faith in Man—so it gave him no problem. He did not fear it.

The tombstone was less ornate than the others. This one had no legend thereon. It merely said:

PAUL DANE

BORN JANUARY 2, 1924

DIED DECEMBER 1, 1956

The current death date was the fourth one. It was a standard item, and the TV cameras had focused previously on each of them, as the honey-voiced commentator spoke of them in hushed tones. The scene was dark, for night had again fallen in the cemetery.

Helen Ralph crouched far back in the field of marble headstones. Her coat had torn coming over the wire fence

near the newly-plowed area toward the rear of the cemetery, and though there was no crowd (having been cleared for optimum TV broadcasting) she was afraid her yellow dress might draw someone's attention.

She crouched down, till everything was silent. And she waited. She knew this broadcast would be Paul Dane's biggest publicity-getter of the entire time. Her mind nagged at the problem of why he had not been arrested, or stopped. There was something wrong there, but the thought could not quite form.

It was as though he had some invisible ally, who kept all interference from him . . .

But her thoughts were scattered, for the indrawn breaths of the cameramen came to her across the graveyard.

She rose quickly, and stole through the silent ebony of the cemetery. Then she was in sight of the tombstone, and the fresh, moist earth at its foot. A hand was rising.

Quickly, knowing she was being seen in a million homes, she sprinted across the slippery earth, and stooped at the foot of the grave. The red paint splashed from the can she had carried so carefully, and the brush slapped across

the marble, as she scrawled the one word that would tell all those people what Paul Dane really was.

Not a prophet, not a giver of life, not a saviour, but simply a

DEVIL

The hand came up from the earth that had claimed it many times, and it gripped her tightly about the wrist. In homes where darkened living rooms held people awe-struck and terrified, a girl was forced to drop a brush dripping with red paint, and they saw her pulled to the earth.

They saw her fall face-first into the dirt, and the hand rise to her throat. The body remained underground, but the white, thin, hairy arm strangled, and the scream ended in a bubble at her lips.

Then suddenly, the hand loosened, and disappeared back into the Earth. The girl lay there, barely alive, the breath coming to her in short rasping whines.

In the ground, Paul Dane lay listening:

I told you all you had to fear was recognition by a good woman.

But . . . but . . . good? Good woman? Not her! She's guilty of all the sins of the flesh I

was able to corrupt her with!

Just the same, Paul Dane, you failed to realize, she committed those sins in good faith, and to her they were not sins. because she truly loved you. And to a woman in love, nothing is a sin, if it is for love. She has committed no sin . . .

Your mission is finished, Paul Dane.

Paul Dane lay on his back, feeling himself being dragged down through the unresisting sod, and he screamed silently. No, no, no! You can't take me! She's robbed me of immortality. I don't want to go!

Then his thoughts brightened—if a man on his way to

Hell can have any bright thoughts—and he thought of all the levels he had risen, by the soul-bounty that had been paid. Each human being had been a level toward the top.

At least I'm not at the bottom. My hell cannot be bad.

Oh, you rose those levels, all right, Paul Dane. But I forgot to mention . . . I've devised a singular Hell for you. You are to remain forever on a level . . . with all the people you damned. And if they cannot find ways to make your eternities horrible . . . well, I've always got extra brochures.

The gentleman with the bulbous nose grinned and snapped his tail. **THE END**

JOE'S DINER





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THE METAL MARTYR

By HENRY SLESAR

Here was the strangest emergency operation ever performed in deep space. It required the hand of a master surgeon, and in order to forestall disaster, the patient had to die!

ONCE they named it Poseidon. Now, the planet spun like a black cinder in the cosmos, and the colonists of the New World system wryly dubbed it Ashes. It was a dead world, murdered by a wrathful god with a weapon called cobalt. But now and then, life flickered; faintly, feebly. And one day a voice sounded in the radarphones of the planet Quicksilver, calling pitifully for help.

'Come kill me. Please. Come kill me!'

The Space Ambulance was busy.

The internes, in their cool white smocks, moved briskly around the loading platform. They snapped orders at the corpsmen bearing the stretcher cases. They offered pat

words of sympathy to tearful relatives. They ministered briefly to critical patients, assuaging their fears of what acceleration might do to their overworked hearts, their broken bones, their tortured lungs.

"You—corpsman!"

The interne's hand fell on Russ Fairchild's shoulder. The corpsman shrugged it off, trying to conceal his vexation.

"Check the g-straps in Section 3," said the interne, commandingly. "And don't miss any!"

"Yes, sir!"

Fairchild strode off and went into the spaceship. At the doorway, he almost collided with Wetzell. The other corpsman gave him a rueful grin and jerked his head back in the direction of the interior.



Death in any form was not allowed.

"Full house," he said. "Thirty pieces of meat already. One patient more, and we'll have to double 'em up."

"Then start doubling," said Fairchild curtly. "Control just told us to hold up for another victim."

Wetzel leered. "Well, there is a redhead in Section 3 I wouldn't mind doubling with. Take a look when you go in."

"I'm checking g-straps," said Fairchild. He brushed by Wetzel, who gave him a mock salute and stepped out on the platform.

Inside the ship, an old man with a bandaged rib cage reached out for Fairchild with a withered arm and stopped him in his path.

"Doctor!" he said weakly. "Doctor, can I talk to you?"

Fairchild looked down at the wrinkled hand that clutched his gray sleeve. He noted the bulging veins, and the green discoloration of the fingernails. "Silicontoxis," he thought. "Green Fever." It was the fungoid killer of the planet Quicksilver.

He pushed the hand away. "Sorry," he said tersely. "I'm not a doctor. I'm a corpsman. Ask one of the men in white."

"It's the pain—" the old man gasped.

Fairchild hesitated. "Where does it hurt?" he asked.

The old man groaned and clutched his bandaged ribs. "In here. Bad. Can't you do something?"

Fairchild looked around him, then he put his strong brown fingers on the old man's ribs. With professional deftness, he examined the bandages.

"These are not tight enough," he said. "I'll get an interne to fix you up. Lie back and take it easy."

With a sigh, the old man relaxed. "All right, doctor," he said. "Thank you."

"I'm not a doctor!" Fairchild snapped. He grabbed a fold of his gray uniform and tugged. "See?" he said. "Gray. Gray!" But the old man had already closed his eyes.

The corpsman continued on his way. A young interne was reading fever charts in Section 3 when he got there, and Fairchild interrupted him.

"Silicontoxis in Section 1," he said. "Bandages coming loose. Maybe you can fix him up on your way back."

The interne looked up. "Russ!" he said. "I didn't know you were aboard." He looked embarrassed.

"Where else would I go? Fix him up, will you, Paul? The old man's in a lot of pain."

I would have done it myself, but you know the rules—"

The young face flushed. "Sure, of course. I'll see him. Listen, Russ—"

"What?"

"I—just wanted to tell you—"

"Tell me what?" said the corpsman. "How sorry you are?"

"Something like that." The interne swallowed hard. "Anyway, I'm glad you're aboard. Even if—"

"Even if I'm wearing gray instead of white," Fairchild finished. "I know."

"It was a tough operation. I don't think I could have done better, Russ. It was just the breaks."

"Save it, Paul." Fairchild touched him on the back familiarly. "You've got work to do, and so have I. Doctor," he added.

He walked off stiffly.

"Corpsman!"

It was a woman's voice, the kind that evoked a sultry image. Fairchild turned towards it, and remembered what Wetzel had said. Wetzel was a vulgar clod, but his appraisals of women were often reliable.

Her red hair was spilled on the pillow like a burst of flame. Her lips were equally

fiery, and they were parted now in a smile that was much too seductive for an Ambulance patient.

"Corpsman, could I get something to drink?"

Fairchild's face relaxed for the first time that day. "I'll send a nurse around, Miss. I've got things to do."

"Can't it wait?" The woman stretched out a well-molded arm. "I thought the patients always came first." Her smugness was a bit annoying.

"They do." Without thinking, Fairchild picked up the chart at the end of her cot and examined it. Her temperature was on a normal plateau. The bottom sheet described her condition as "fatigue." He looked at her curiously.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"Awful," she said. "I'm a complete wreck."

The corpsman looked at the first page again. The name read: ALLINGHAM, DEE. He hooked the chart back on the cot.

"Lie back and rest," he told her. "You'll get your water in a little while. We'll be blasting away in fifteen minutes."

"What's all the delay?" Her eyes met his, and said a few things. Fairchild looked away.

"Another patient coming,"

he said. "Be here any minute."

How long will it take to get to Home?"

"Six, seven days." He started to go, but something compelled him to linger by the girl's bedside. He told himself that it was medical curiosity, and to justify it, he reached across the blanket and took her pulse. Her wrist was cool.

"How'm I doing?" she asked coyly.

"*Fairchild!*"

The corpsman dropped the wrist and wheeled around. A tall man with iron-gray hair, wearing a military uniform, was standing behind him. His face was leathered, and so deeply scarred around the mouth and brow that he seemed to be wearing a perpetual frown. But now, Captain Ball of the Ambulance was grimacing as well.

"What do you think you're doing?"

Fairchild straightened his back. "Nothing, sir," he said. "Taking a pulse."

"Maybe that was nothing last year," said the captain. "You know different now, don't you?"

"Yes, sir!"

"You know what corpsman duties are?"

"I do, sir."

"Then stick to them!" The captain looked stormily at the pretty girl. "Sorry, Miss Al-lingham," he said. "If you require medical attention, call the interne." He glared at Fairchild. "Since you don't seem to be busy," he said, "you can go up forward and help Wetzel. He's bringing in the last patient."

"Sir, I was supposed to check the g-straps—"

"Then why haven't you?" said the captain.

Fairchild's face darkened. "I was just about to."

"Do it on your way back, corpsman." The captain turned on his heel. "But bring that patient in first."

"Yes, sir."

Wetzel said: "Wait 'til you see this one!"

Fairchild, about to lift his end of the stretcher, paused. He looked more closely at the unconscious figure.

"Android!" he said.

"Now we're a bunch of mechanics," said Wetzel cheerfully. "Pretty soon we'll be ferrying sick computers and broken rockets."

Fairchild studied the placid, smooth-planed face in wonderment. It was blank, expressionless, without benefit of the color that pumping blood gave to the human coun-

tenance. He winced slightly, then he picked up the stretchers handles.

"That's not the whole story, either," said Wetzel. "Wait 'til you see his chart. I sneaked a look on the loading platform."

"What ails him?"

"I dunno." Wetzel grunted as they moved through the ship's narrow passageway. "But I know where he comes from. Guess."

"Let's not play games, Wetzel."

"Okay, professor!" Wetzel's tone was light, but there was a barbed edge. "Find out for yourself."

But as they entered Section 3 of the Space Ambulance, Wetzel couldn't keep the secret any longer.

"He's from Ashes!" he announced.

"What?"

"So help me. Says so on the chart. 'Patient removed from planet Poseidon in state of shock.'"

They strapped the android in the one remaining cot of Section 3, only two beds away from the red-headed "fatigue" case. Wetzel nudged the other corpsman when he spotted her.

"Did you see her?" he whispered. "How about that?"

Fairchild shrugged. "Very

nice," he said dryly. "She's Dee Allingham. Mean anything to you?"

"Depends. That babe could mean *plenty* to me." He chuckled lasciviously.

"Allingham's a big man on Quicksilver. Head of a mining company."

Wetzel grinned. "Well," he said, "my Pop used to tell me, 'Leo, it's just as easy to love a rich girl as a poor girl.' " But he didn't say "love." "Listen to Pop I say!"

Fairchild tugged at the g-strap that secured the android into position. As the buckle tightened around the synthetic man's chest, he suddenly groaned and stirred. The perfectly-shaped head rolled from side to side, and the modelled lips parted.

"Our boy's moving," said Wetzel.

"I think he's trying to say something." Fairchild leaned over him.

"Corpsman!"

It was the girl again. Wetzel came to attention when she spoke, and dug Fairchild's side with his elbow. "Hey," he said. "Miss Millions wants us."

The other didn't budge. "Probably wants a cocktail," he said acidly. "You handle it."

"With pleasure!" Wetzel moved off rapidly.

The android had become still. Fairchild put his hand on its chest and then drew it away with something like squeamishness. There was no heartbeat; only the unpleasant murmur of some internal apparatus.

Then the android opened its eyes.

"Kill me," he said, staring at the corpsman. "Please. Please! KILL ME!"

The blast-off horn moaned throughout the ship. Captain Ball saluted the young interne, and gave his hand one peremptory shake. The two corpsmen and three nurses stood at attention as the leathery-faced man gave them final inspection. Finally he was satisfied, and went forward to the pilot's cabin.

The journey was under way.

Ten minutes after blast-off, the young interne made a hurried accounting of the effects of the acceleration on his passengers.

Three of them were short of breath, and needed an oxygen booster.

Two of them were bleeding badly from the nose, mouth, and ears.

One of them, an old man in

Section 1, had been spared the misery of lingering silicon-toxis. He was dead.

The crew had survived the blast without ill effects. But Wetzel still had a complaint.

"It makes me sick," he said to Fairchild. "Wet-nursing a machine! Now, I get a better idea. Maybe that little red-head in 3 could use a nice sponge-bath. That would be my idea of service."

"Sure," sneered Fairchild. "She's real sick. 'Fatigue.'"

"Oh, I know the poop on that," said the other confidentially. "Seems she wants to get to Home in the worst way. But the next spacer out of Quicksilver doesn't leave for at least two weeks."

"What?" said Fairchild, unbelievably.

"It's straight," Wetzel assured him. "So she pulls the big sick act, and gets a berth on the Ambulance. Pretty clever, huh?"

Fairchild frowned. "Yeah. Clever, like robbing orphans. Doesn't that spoiled bitch know that beds are precious?"

"Come off it, professor! We had the room. We even had room enough for an android, didn't we?"

"But if we didn't," insisted Fairchild, "she'd have got on board anyway. Her old man could pull enough strings."

Wetzel stood up from the coffee-room table. His fleshy, red-cheeked face was set in displeasure.

"Still got stars in your eyes, huh, professor? Good clean-living boy, huh? You weren't so clean when you got a faceful of floating blood, were you? I'll bet you were a mess then!"

"Can it, Wetzel!"

Wetzel grinned humorlessly. "Sore spot, huh, Russ? You were gonna be a big-shot surgeon. But you couldn't handle a little zero-g operation, could you?"

Fairchild got up angrily, his hands clenched in two hard fists. "I said can it!" he shouted.

"You scare me!" Wetzel jeered. "You frighten me to death! I heard about you, professor. One little incision and you lost your head. Blubbered like a goddam kid!"

Fairchild reached across and seized Wetzel's tunic by the chest. He shoved the corpsman backwards.

"Go on!" said Wetzel. "Take a poke! Let me have it, doc! I'm only a lousy corpsman, remember? I got no right to push *you* around!"

Fairchild shook with his rage. Then he made a growling noise in his throat and let go. Wetzel brushed off his

uniform, and grinned widely. He watched Fairchild re-seat himself and wrap his hands around a mug of coffee, staring into the black depths.

"That's it," said Wetzel. "Save your strength, professor. How long will it take to get another chance? Two years? Three? You got a lot of studying to do."

Fairchild wouldn't answer. Then Wetzel's good humor seemed to be restored. He clapped his hand on the other's back.

"Ah, what the hell," he said. "No good us bein' at each other's throats. What do you say, Russ? Pals?"

Fairchild looked up at him blankly. "Okay, Wetzel. Let's forget it." But he didn't shake hands.

"Hi, doc!"

Fairchild looked around. Dec Allingham was standing at the foot of her cot, clutching the rail to keep from floating off.

"What are you doing?" he said. "Why are you out of bed?"

She smiled. "I got tired of staying in bed. And besides—I can't just lie here and listen to that—that Thing over there."

Fairchild looked in the direction of her eyes. The an-

droid was lying on his back, eyes opened.

"What's he been saying?"

"You know what. Same old business. He wants to die."

"You better get back to bed."

She ignored his admonition. "What's wrong with him, anyway? What kind of android do they make on Ashes?"

"How did you know about Ashes?" Fairchild said sharply. Then he realized that Wetzel must have been talking. "We don't know much about it," he told her. "They built their robots and androids for military purposes. The population was small."

"But fierce," said the girl, her eyes glowing. "Fierce and brave."

Fairchild felt disgust for the look of excitement on her face. "They were throwbacks," he said. "Hot-headed belligerents. They weren't smart enough or strong enough to make a peaceful existence, so they blew up their whole world."

"But they were *alive*," said Dee. "You have to admit that!"

"And now they're dead," Fairchild replied abruptly. "All that's left are poor helpless things like that—" He

gestured towards the synthetic man.

"Kill me!" it moaned.

"Why don't you *do* something for it? Why don't you put it out of its misery?"

"That's not my job. We'll let the Home doctors do it. And besides—*hey!*" He cried out as the girl suddenly vaulted herself away from the cot and drifted rapidly towards him with weightless speed.

"Catch me, corpsman!" she said.

Fairchild had no choice. His arms reached out and caught her in mid-flight, around her trim waist. She laughed loudly as he held her.

"You damned fool!" he said.

"Good catch, doc! Don't let me go!"

"Where do you think you are—"

She giggled. "Don't you like it?"

Viciously, he carried her back to the cot and put her down. He fumbled with the g-strap, trying to hold her squirming figure on the cot.

"Kill me! Kill me!" said the android loudly.

At the sound of his flat, metallic, mournful voice, the girl ceased her struggling. She lay quietly as the corpsman completed the strapping job. Fairchild looked fluster-

ed, but she was no longer enjoying his confusion.

"Behave yourself!" he said. "Quit acting like a spoiled child."

"Why can't you do something about that damned thing?" she said. "'Kill me! Kill me!' It's driving me crazy!"

"He has more right to be here than you do, Miss Allingham."

She pouted. "You're pretty high-and-mighty for a man who—" She stopped.

"Yes?" said Fairchild.

"Oh, nothing. Go away, corpsman." She turned her head to the wall. "You bore me to death."

"Kill me!" said the android.

On the fourth day in space, Fairchild got to know his passengers better.

There were two space-tug pilots, both with collapsed lungs resulting from a meteor strike on their ship.

There was a case of space blindness, and a sad one, because the victim was a child of nine.

There were three cases of Mott's Disease, the strange, strangling illness that the colonists had to fight on every planet in the New World system.

There were half a dozen radiation cases.

The rest were assorted, including old standby ailments that the settlers couldn't seem to leave behind them on Earth.

But as it turned out, the deadliest disease aboard wasn't even listed in standard pathological textbooks. It was the same pernicious disease that had plagued mankind since the first selfish act took place in the Garden of Eden.

"What do you think of our android?"

Paul, the young interne, sat back on his bunk and put a cold pipe between his teeth. Fairchild, who had reluctantly accepted the invitation to the interne's quarters, considered the question. All was quiet for a moment.

"I've got one theory," he said tentatively. "But no proof."

"What is it?"

"I don't think he wants to die out of pure misery."

The interne, thwarted by the No Smoking rule aboard the Ambulance, sucked on his empty pipe. "How do you mean, Russ?"

"I mean this. I think our android friend wants to die because he has to. I think he was *built* for suicide."

Paul shivered. "That's a horrible thought."

"Remember," the corpsman said. "The people on Ashes built androids for war. They were creating soldiers, to spare them from bloodshed."

"Yes, but android soldiers would *accept* death. They wouldn't *seek* it. That would be wasteful."

"Of course," Fairchild agreed. "But I think they resorted to building special-purpose androids, designed to do nothing but kill themselves for the cause."

"Like the Kamikazies of World War Two—"

"Exactly. Resembling humans as much as they do, these suicidal androids could infiltrate a position and then knock themselves off."

"But why?" Paul took the pipe out of his mouth. "What would they gain?"

"I haven't figured that out yet." Fairchild stood up and looked at the books strapped to the interne's cot. They were all medical volumes: *Space Medicine*, *Cosmic Radiation Pathology*, *Diseases of the Outer Planets*. He thumbed their bindings sadly.

"Well, maybe I'll figure it out before the trip's over." He started for the doorway, but froze when the unexpected happened.

BOOM!

"What was that?"

"Are we hit?" Paul jumped to his feet.

"It was an explosion! Aft, someplace."

"Let's go!"

They went through the doorway in a hurry. As they raced through the ship, those passengers who could lift their heads were doing so, curiously.

"What's happened?" one of the space-tug pilots called to Fairchild as he rushed past.

"Don't know!"

"Fairchild! Williams! Wetzel! What's happening back there?" It was Captain Ball, following closely on their heels.

"We're going to find out, sir," said Paul.

The three men continued down the length of the Ambulance. When they reached Section 3, Wetzel joined them. On first glance, everything looked normal. Then Fairchild's gaze went to the strange patient from the planet Ashes.

"The android!" he gasped.

They rushed to the cot. The synthetic man lay on his back, eyes still open. The even features were still placid and expressionless, but somehow, even more peaceful than before.

There was a gaping hole in its chest.

"Someone's shot him!" said Paul.

They looked in horror at the mock human mechanism, exposed by the still smoking chasm that a heat-bullet had created. The revelation was extraordinary.

Captain Ball exploded. "Wetzel! Fairchild! I hold you strictly accountable for this!"

Paul said: "Sir, Mr. Fairchild was off duty. He was in my cabin."

"You can't blame *me*!" Wetzel whined. "I didn't have anything to do with it."

Fairchild bent over the android.

"Is it—is he still alive?" Paul asked uneasily.

"I think so. Hard to tell, without a pulse or breathing. But I think his lips are moving."

"Who would want to *do* such a thing?" said Ball, looking around at the bed-ridden passengers helplessly. His mind filled with thoughts of triplicate forms, and investigations, and senatorial subpoenas.

"But he's not *human*," Wetzel protested. "I mean, he's really just a machine. Does it even matter?"

"He was our responsibility," Paul said harshly.

"Quiet!" Fairchild bent closer to the moving lips. "I think he's going to say something."

They stared silently.

The android's mouth trembled, its perfect lips struggling to form a word.

"Th—th—"

"What's he saying?" asked the captain.

"Quiet, you damn fool!" Fairchild forgot his rank for a moment, but fortunately, Ball did, too.

"Th—th—thanks . . ." the android said. "Thanks . . . mmm . . . Miss . . ."

Fairchild looked up.

"Did you hear that?" he said grimly.

The three men looked blank. Fairchild got to his feet and pushed past them. He went over to the cot twice removed from the android's and said:

"Where's the gun, Miss Allingham?"

The redhead stuck out her lower lip. "What gun?" she said.

"Don't give me that!" said Fairchild savagely. "The heat-gun you shot the android with!"

The pretty mouth opened in surprise. "What? Me?"

Fairchild moved quickly.

He reached down and gripped the girl's shoulder. His strong hand pushed her head away from the pillow before she could prevent it. It came out with a small, jewel-encrusted revolver.

The corpsman examined it. It bore the initials D. A., and had obviously been fired.

Tight-lipped, he turned to the commanding officer. "Captain Ball," he said, "I suggest that this woman be placed under arrest."

"Miss Allingham!" The captain looked unhappier than ever, thinking of her father's widespread influence. "Why did you do it?"

The girl glared at him and then began to sulk. "Don't look at me as if I were a *murderer*," she said. "It's only an android. It's not a real person. It's a machine!"

Paul said quietly: "But you still had no right . . ."

"No right?" Dee's nostrils dilated with wrath. "That thing *wanted* to die. It kept *begging* for it. It was driving me crazy!"

Fairchild went back to the android's cot.

"I did him a favor!" she shouted after him. "I did more for him than you could, you phoney doctor! At least I had the *guts*!"

"He's still alive," said the corpsman.

Wetzel said: "What's that funny noise?"

The captain and the interne came over.

"Some piece of machinery's going," said Ball.

Fairchild looked at them.

"I've got a horrible idea," he said. "Paul—remember what we were talking about? About the android, and the suicide impulse?"

"Yes?" The interne looked puzzled.

"Well, there *could* be an advantage to such an android in war." Fairchild stood up, and stared down at the gaping wound.

"If he carried a bomb," he said.

"A bomb?" The captain took a hesitant step backwards.

"Russ, you don't think—"

"Well, figure it out. The android wants to die. The men who made him wanted him to die. Because they knew that wherever he was would be destroyed with him."

Dee Allingham shrieked. "Oh, my God! My God! We'll all be killed!"

"Shut up!" Wetzel left the redhead's side and came over to the other corpsman. He was sweating. "Russ—we gotta do something!"

"If it's true," said Paul, "then we can't let him die. We can't!"

"How do we stop him?" Fairchild examined their faces, but no one seemed to have an answer. Then Wetzel said:

"We can throw him out! We can ditch him!"

"But he'll just follow the ship!" said Paul.

Captain Ball licked his lips. "We can strap a rocket exhaust to him. We can shoot him out into space!"

"But how far?" asked Fairchild. "If there's a bomb in his body, it's sure to be a cobalt. Even if we shot away a thousand miles, the concussion could rip us apart. Anyway," he said, turning his gaze once more to the dying synthetic man, "I don't think we'll have the time."

"Talk! Talk!" the girl shrieked, and this time the other passengers broke their stunned silence and began to wail in fear. "Why don't you do something?" She began to sob hysterically.

"We will," said Fairchild. He spoke to Paul. "We can operate," he said.

"Operate?" Paul stared back. "But how—on what—?"

"Can you do it, Williams?" asked the captain, his voice unsteady.

"No!" Paul shook his head violently. "I wouldn't know where to begin—" He clutched Fairchild's sleeve. "Russ! You do it! You've got a steadier hand! Please—"

They all turned to Fairchild. Suddenly, the corpsman seemed calm.

"I'll try it," he said. His tone seemed confident.

They put the android on the table.

With his bare hand, Fairchild explored the artificial rib cage.

"Be careful," Paul breathed. "Be careful, Russ."

"Quiet!"

His hand touched the sharp edge of some metallic box. It felt hot, as if it contained high-voltage current. He jerked his fingers away.

"Rubber glove!" he snapped.

Paul helped him on with it. Quickly, he returned to his exploration.

"Seems like ten thousand wires," he said. "All of them ripped apart by the bullet." His hand touched something else. "But there's some kind of cable—"

"I think it's hopeless," Paul said. "We don't know the mechanics of this thing—"

"Then we have to figure them out! We have to find

out what's *unnecessary* in its body?"

"Unnecessary?"

"Don't you see? The android has parts resembling streamlined human organs. A lot of parts have been built *out*. But if we find something extra, something we can't explain—something that doesn't belong in the anatomical system—"

"Then it will be the bomb!"

Fairchild nodded. "The cable must correspond to the spine, or the ganglia. It's the nerve center of the android. The box probably performs a heart function, and—wait a minute!"

"What is it?"

"This box is thick. Much *too* thick."

"What do you mean, Russ?"

"They wouldn't require this much thickness for strength. There are plenty of alloys that would have done the job, and be a lot more practical."

Paul shook his head. "I don't get you, Russ."

"Don't you see? It's *lead*, Paul. They're *sheilding* something in there, not just protecting it!"

"The bomb!"

"The cable must be attached to it. The trigger must react when the nerves of the android go dead."

"Then if he dies—"

"He will die, Paul." Fairchild yanked his hand out as the hot box began to burn through the glove. "Nothing can save him now."

Paul swallowed. "Then that's it. We're done for."

"Maybe not," said Fairchild. "If I can disconnect the box before the android dies, and substitute an electrical charge for the nerve impulses—" he looked hopefully at the interne.

He began to unpack the instruments from Paul's case.

"Call the ship's power man. Get him here right away, with a portable generator."

Captain Ball's face was as white as an official paper.

When Fairchild came out of the emergency operating room, he stared at him wordlessly.

Wetzel left the sobbing, red-haired woman and came up to the corpsman.

Paul came out of the room, his face drawn with the tension of the last few minutes.

"Well?" said the captain.

Fairchild smiled wanly.

"The operation was a success," he said. "But the patient died."

Paul put his hand on the sleeve of Fairchild's gray uniform.

"Thanks, doc," he said.

THE END

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Monday Immortal

By RALPH BURKE

SENATOR Edmund Cardiff was on his way up to the lab that housed Project Peep-hole when the reporter stepped out of the alcove and blocked his way.

"I'm in a hurry," Cardiff said in annoyance. "Can't you fellows wait for a press conference on this Venus Mines thing?"

"It's not the Mines situation, Senator—it's about you. Is there any truth to the story that you narrowly escaped assassination outside the Capitol early this morning?"

"None whatsoever," Cardiff snapped. "And now, if you'll excuse me—"

"But—"

Cardiff didn't wait for butts. He stepped around the man and entered the elevator.

Cardiff had seven days to live. Terrifying knowledge, but there was comfort in one aspect of it: For seven days they couldn't kill him with an axe.

"Sixteen," he said, and lit a cigarette. His fingers quivered a little as he did so. The robot operator hummed its acknowledgment and the elevator swooped upward.

So the press had picked up the story after all, he thought. It had all happened so quickly that Cardiff had hoped no one had seen—the wild blaster shot, the rapid interchange of fire, the gunman lying crumpled in the street. Evidently someone had seen the duel, though.

Too bad. He didn't want the word getting around that he was in the process of becoming a martyr, or else he'd be subjected to constant armed guard as long as the Senate was in session—and that might hamper his activities. He made a mental note



With no risk involved it didn't matter how he traveled.

to issue an official denial of the rumors, squared his broad shoulders, and stepped through the widening sphincter of the elevator into a quiet, dimly-lit corridor.

He turned left, walked about fifty yards into the half-darkness, reached a door, and pressed his thumb against the electronic door-plate. The plate recognized his thumbprint and the door slid open to admit him.

"Holley? Are you there, Holley?"

"I'm coming, Senator Cardiff," said a thin, dry voice. A small man with hunched shoulders and tapering, delicate hands appeared. He was Lloyd Hollister, Ph.D.—the world's ranking expert on temporal theory, and the mainspring of Project Peephole. At the moment, he was staring up at the powerful figure of Edmund Cardiff with a strange expression of curiosity and pity in his weak, watery eyes.

"How's it going?" Cardiff asked. "Do you have that report on Jansen yet?"

"Ah—no," the little man said. "There's been a—a complication. Would you care to step inside, Mr. Cardiff?"

Cardiff frowned in annoyance as the small man led him

to the room adjoining, which was completely filled with a wild, sprawling tangle of machinery centering around a large, gleaming screen. This was Project Peephole—the time-viewer project, Very Top Secret, to which only Cardiff and a few others had access at the moment. The senator was anxious.

Cardiff glanced around. "Well? What's up? I asked you to take a Peep and let me know whether my man's going to get back from Venus in the next week. I need that evidence if I'm going to smash that cartel, Holley."

Hollister knotted his wiry fingers together and chewed his lip before speaking. "I've run a tentative check on your agent Jansen, sir. He didn't return in any of the next six days."

Cardiff frowned. "That means I'll have to delay the opening of my drive a little. But why didn't you check further ahead, Holley?"

Hollister smiled apologetically. "I did, Senator Cardiff. I got as far as seven days from today."

"And?"

"And I shut the machine off, sir. I—"

"What's going on, Hollister?" Cardiff demanded an-

grily. "What are you hiding from me?"

"Nothing, sir," Hollister sighed. He snapped on a switch and the myriad tubes of the time-viewer began to hum.

After a few moments, the screen started to glow.

"I've left it exactly as it was when I stopped looking, sir. That's the way it was."

Cardiff looked at the screen and went pale with disbelief. It showed, simply, an unfolded copy of the *Globe*. The date was clearly indicated—Monday, May 7, 2386. One week from today, exactly.

He stared at the bold black eight-column streamer head. It said:

FIND MANGLED BODY OF SENATOR CARDIFF

Underneath, in smaller type it said:

Capitol Police Investigating Case

And underneath that, just above the illegible type of the story:

BELIEVE CRUSADING SOLON WAS MURDERED

Seven days to live. The four words ran through Car-

MONDAY IMMORTAL

diff's stunned brain over and over again, as he left the Project Peephole lab and returned to his own office in downtown Washington.

The future was unalterable—Hollister had proved that. No matter what steps you took to change it, it always snapped back to the form the time-viewer revealed, one way or another. So there was no point in running away, or in spending the next week in cold storage. Somehow, inexorably, Edmund Cardiff would have to die seven days from now.

He scowled as he tossed the words over and over in his mind. *Why now? Why so soon?*

He knew why he would die; that didn't require a time-viewer to figure out. The powerful Venus Mines cartel had already made one attempt to erase him—and, obviously, they would keep at it till they were successful.

But that left a week. Cardiff smiled grimly. In a week, a lot can be done.

He punched a button on his desk. A few moments later, a tall, thin young man appeared. He was Ralph Morley, Cardiff's chief assistant.

"Morning, Mr. Cardiff."

"Hello, Ralph. Sit down, will you?"

Morley took a chair near Cardiff's desk. "What did Hollister have to say, sir?"

With an effort, Cardiff concealed his emotions. "Nothing much. Jansen won't be back for at least eight days."

Morley's face darkened. "Oh—too bad, sir. That means we'll have to delay bringing the cartel business up in the Senate, won't it?"

"No," Cardiff said sharply. "On the contrary. We're accelerating the entire schedule. I want to have the evidence in my hands by—oh, next Tuesday, say." He tried to make his voice sound casual. "Then I'll prepare the documents and raise the matter on the Senate floor."

"But what about Jansen, sir? He's bringing the evidence with him from Venus!"

Cardiff chuckled. "There's plenty evidence of illegality right here on Earth, Ralph—in the cartel's home office. Their files probably contain records of every filthy bit of exploitation they've carried out on Venus. If we can get hold of them, I'll be able to smash the cartel by getting the Senate to revoke its charter—and then we can open Venus to legitimate colonization."

Which I'll never live to see, Cardiff added bitterly. The image on the screen in Hollister's lab was as good as a sentence of death—but Cardiff was determined to drag the cartel down to death with him.

"Why the sudden rush?" Morley asked. "I thought we had almost a month to get the documents ready."

"We don't any more—and don't ask me why. We'll have to have everything ready by next Monday."

"Yes, sir."

"The important thing now is to get a man inside the cartel headquarters and case the building," Cardiff said. "We've got to get to their files. And we've only got a week."

Morley nodded. "I'll get right with it, Mr. Cardiff."

"Good. Keep me posted on what happens."

Cardiff watched the young man leave, then whirled and began dialing the combination of the safe behind his desk. The safe swung open.

Inside was the fuel with which Cardiff fed the bonfire of his hatred—his painstakingly-assembled collection of documents that told the story of Venus Mines' abuse of their charter. The sinister,

octopus-like cartel had managed to get a tentacle into every part of Venusian life and controlled the planet utterly.

Cardiff had been working on the exposé for over a year, readying it for its presentation before the Senate. Overcoming the powerful Mines lobby would be hard, but Cardiff thought he could do it. All that remained was for Jansen, the spy he had sent to Venus, to return with the clinching proofs.

Well, there was no time to wait for Jansen now. Time was running out for Cardiff. He bent over his desk, arranging his materials. It was a bitter thing to be cut short at the moment of success.

A new thought struck him suddenly. The time-viewer had predicted his death next Monday—and so it also guaranteed him practical immortality *until* that day! It could be a week of taking risks, of venturing into places where no sane man would go—since, come what may, Cardiff would die no sooner than next Monday. It was a small consolation, but an important one.

"The building's guarded thoroughly," Ralph Morley told him. "Our man couldn't even get close."

Cardiff looked up from his work, scowling. "There's no way in at all?"

"There is, but I don't recommend it. He said it might be possible to get into an air-shaft from an adjoining building, but there's only a chance in five that the man who tried it would make the jump successfully. It means a suicide mission, sir."

Cardiff closed his eyes for a moment and ground his thumbs into them. He had been working nearly thirty straight hours and he was starting to feel it. *Hell of a way to spend your last few days alive*, he thought. *But what I'm doing has to be done.*

"Just how difficult is this jump, Ralph?"

"As I said—one chance in five."

"But it's our *only* chance," Cardiff said reflectively.

"Unless we wait for Jansen," Morley pointed out.

"Jansen can't be waited for. We'll have to chance this jump and get a man inside that building."

"Yes, sir. Do you want me to ask for volunteers, or should I set up a lottery among the staff?"

Cardiff stood up. "Neither. I'll be the man making the

jump." Seeing the look of astonishment widen on Morley's face, he glared fiercely at him. "And I don't want an argument."

The bewildered attache gaped for a moment, then subsided. He knew from long experience that there was no point in trying to argue with Edmund Cardiff. "Yes, sir," he said weakly.

"Good. Now, I want you to show me the layout, and I want to talk with the man who did the reconnoitering."

Morley nodded. "Sir—"

"I expect to come through this thing alive, or I wouldn't be trying it," Cardiff said. "But just in case I don't, I'll leave you full details of what's to be done. In the event I don't return, you're to take all our documents to Senator Grendon—he'll be willing to propose the thing on the floor. If not, go to the President. You'll have to wait for Jansen, of course. He ought to be back any week now."

"Yes, sir."

"That'll be all, then. Send in the man who did the reconnaissance work, will you?" Cardiff was almost ready.

On the rooftop, Cardiff rocked lightly on the balls of his feet and surveyed the dis-

tant airshaft-opening. It was quite a jump.

Cardiff was in his late thirties, but still agile and vigorous; he hadn't let his body go flabby, and he had the reflexes of a skilled athlete of twenty. He was counting on that to pull him through — that, and the knowledge that he couldn't die before Monday.

The elimination of hazard has a lot to do with the way the muscles function. A man confident that he'll make a leap successfully—a man who *knows* he will—will make it, while one whose muscles are clogged with fear-generated adrenalin might falter and hang back at the crucial moment of the leap. Cardiff was not troubled by doubts.

He stared down at the gleaming chrome sides of the building below, the building that housed Venus Mines. It was virtually a fortress—but every fortress had to have a chink in its armor somewhere.

Carefully, Cardiff fastened the stout hemp hawser around a projecting spar on the roof of the building he would leap from. He tugged until he was certain the rope would hold. It was a hundred feet down to the roof of the

Venus Mines building, and forty feet out. With proper timing, he could make it.

He hurled the rope out over the abyss and watched as it swung out, hovered within a few feet of the airshaft, and dropped back. Yes, it had the range. But if he miscalculated, if he should somehow let go too soon or too late, he would drop eight hundred feet to the ground. Or if he froze up and didn't let go at all, the momentum of the rope would swing him back and bash him against the side of the building he leaped from.

But there wasn't much point in speculating. He was going to make it. It was only Saturday night, after all—he still had three days to live, guaranteed. It was just as inexorable as the fact that he would have to die on Monday.

He reeled in the dangling rope and gripped it firmly, swathing his hands in the silk wrappings that would prevent rope-burn.

He stepped to the edge of the roof and looked down. The sidewalk seemed miles away; the pedestrians, mere bugs. Sucking in his breath, he grasped the rope and swung himself out over the seemingly bottomless gulf.

The rope appeared to take forever to uncoil as he plunged downward and out. He braced himself for the moment of impact as the rope paid itself out completely, and hoped his two hundred pounds would not snap it loose from its mooring.

A stinging shock ran up his arms as the rope drew taut. He glanced down, saw himself hovering just above the gaping airshaft, and in that instant let go.

The rope continued on outward. He dropped straight down, entered the open airshaft perfectly, and plummeted down.

His descent was checked, as he expected, by the metal grid ten feet below. He rebounded off it, struck again, and lay still for just a moment, recovering his equilibrium. Then, quickly, he found the exit from the airshaft and shinnied through, emerging in a corridor of the Venus Mines building.

One chance in five, Cardiff thought. Well, I made it. He wiped away a trickle of perspiration.

With cat-like tread, he tiptoed through the darkened corridors of the building, searching for the room he wanted—the office of B. C.

Kanbeck, the half-legendary head of the cartel.

It took three hours of diligent search through the empty building before he found the executive suite. He glanced at his watch. It was three A.M., Sunday morning. He'd have to get out by that night at the latest; by morning the place would be swarming with Cartel people, and he'd never get out.

Cautiously, he began to work the hinges off the massive door of Kanbeck's office. It took better than an hour for him to finish the job, and, without having disturbed either the lock on the door or the alarm keyed to it, he peeled back the left side of the unhinged door and stepped through.

It was nearly dawn by the time he had succeeded in springing the safe. Outside the suite, he could hear the methodical, unvarying pacing of the robots who guarded the building from evening till dawn. Probably there were some human guards scattered through the building too, but they hadn't seen him yet, and he was safe in here. From outside in the hall it would be impossible to tell that the door had been tampered with.

He looked in the safe, staring at the horde of papers inside—the private files of Venus Mines. This was the end of his search; this was the evidence he needed to smash the rotten cartel in one mighty blow.

Exultantly, he reached forward to collect the damning papers.

"Suppose you keep your hands out of there," a cold voice said behind him.

He whirled, realizing sickeningly that he must have tripped some sort of alarm after all. Three flashlights blinked on, transfixing him with their blinding beams. He held his hands before his eyes as shields and tried to see who was there.

As he struggled to see, arms grasped his arms roughly. He lashed out, felt his fist connect with someone's face, then a length of rope was twisted around him, pinioning him and leaving him helpless.

Vision returned in a few moments, and by then he was securely trussed. He saw a tall man, of about his own height and general build, with a cold, malevolent glint in his eyes and a Number Six Webley Blaster grasped firmly in his right hand. He was obviously in charge; the two

other men, who held him from each side, were dressed in the uniforms of guards.

"Allow me to introduce myself," the tall man said. "My name is Kanbeck—B. C. Kanbeck. May I ask who you may be, and what business you have in my private suite at this hour—or at any hour?"

Cardiff stiffened. This was Kanbeck—the legendary Kanbeck, head of the cartel!

"My name is Smith," he said acidly. "John Smith. I was passing by, and thought I'd drop in for a late-evening snack. Do you mind?"

Kanbeck chuckled hollowly. "Very funny, Mr.—*Smith*." He took a step closer and smashed an open palm against Cardiff's cheek. "But I have little sense of humor about these things. Must I force you to tell me who you are?"

"I'm afraid you must," said Cardiff.

"Very well, then. First search him, George."

The guard on his right jammed a hand into his pocket and pulled out Cardiff's wallet. Kanbeck snatched it eagerly and thumbed through it, eyes wide with surprise.

"We've made quite a catch," he said. "Senator Ed-

mund Cardiff—a common burglar! What is the Senate coming to these days, I wonder?"

He slipped Cardiff's wallet into his own pocket and nodded to the guard at the right. "This is better than I could have dreamed of, having him walk right into our hands."

"Should I burn him, Chief?"

"No—certainly no. Just knock him out, and we'll see what information we can get from him."

Cardiff felt a stinging blow at the side of his neck. He fought for consciousness, but the edge of the guard's hand descended a second time. Cardiff's knees buckled and he blacked out.

When he awoke, he was still in the suite, strapped securely to a chair. He could tell from the growling emptiness in his stomach that he'd been there some time. Through the window, he could see the sun going down.

Kanbeck smiled mirthlessly. "I see the drug is wearing off, Senator."

Cardiff opened both eyes and rolled his head groggily. "What drug?"

"Sodium amytal, Senator. An extremely efficient meth-

od of extracting information. You've planned a most thoughtful campaign against us, Mr. Cardiff. I fail to understand, though, how you could so completely have misunderstood the benevolent policies of Venus Mines."

"Don't feed me that, Kanbeck. I know exactly what you skunks have been up to, and—"

"Yes. You plan to smash our nefarious enterprise to smithereens." Kanbeck smiled amiably. "I'm afraid you won't succeed, though. You've been caught breaking and entering, which happens to be a crime. Should you happen to be killed by one of our watchmen, I believe there won't be much difficulty explaining the matter to the police. And that, I think, would be the end of your crusade."

Cardiff stared bleakly at the tall man with the blaster. He was right; Kanbeck had him cornered and could quite legally get away with his murder now.

"Untie him," Kanbeck ordered.

As the guard reached down to undo Cardiff's bonds, the cartel head turned to the wall safe and began turning the dial.

In a moment Cardiff saw the whole plan. They would force him to the wall and kill him in the act of rifling the safe. There would be no trouble with the police at all, that way.

Only there was one factor Kanbeck wasn't figuring on—Cardiff's private knowledge that he wasn't going to die till Monday. That gave Cardiff a fighting chance to get out of the building with the documents, to blast the cartel before it was too late.

The guard finished unbinding Cardiff just as Kanbeck succeeded in opening the safe.

"Now, Senator, if you'll—"

The sentence was never finished. Cardiff came to life all at once, crashing his fist into the guard's face and leaping from the chair—straight at Kanbeck.

The last thing a man with a blaster expects is that he'll be attacked head-on. Cardiff had the insane assurance that he could not be in any danger, and so he made the suicidal dash in perfect calmness. Kanbeck was taken completely by surprise.

He managed to get off one unaimed bolt of the blaster, and then Cardiff was upon him. Moving with lightning swiftness, the Senator grab-

bed the blaster before Kanbeck could fire a second time, and sent the cartel head reeling backward with a smash in the face.

The stunned guard behind him started to come to, but Cardiff immobilized him with a quick kick backward and went after Kanbeck again. The cartel leader was rocking dizzily back and forth as Cardiff connected a second time.

Kanbeck spun backward and his arms pinwheeled wildly as he began to topple. Seeing what was about to happen, Cardiff made a quick grab for the man, but he was too late. Kanbeck fell backward heavily against the window to the right and smashed through it.

His scream trailed off somewhere about halfway down. Cardiff glanced out and saw the spinning figure dwindling to a mere dot as it approached the distant ground, more than seven hundred feet below. He looked away. It was a lousy death for anyone—even Kanbeck, Cardiff thought.

He recrossed the room and pulled the groggy guard to his feet. "Get out of that uniform, fast," he snapped, gesturing with the blaster. He

emphasized the command with two quick, sobering slaps.

When the guard had stripped, Cardiff tied him securely, picked up a briefcase from a nearby desk, and shoveled the contents of the open safe into it. Then, quickly, Cardiff slipped into the guard's uniform, and, clad as a member of Venus Mines' private police, he strode openly out the door of the suite toward the elevator.

He was half-surprised to discover it was nightfall. Time had streamed past unnoticeably while he had been in the building. Cardiff stood for a moment in the dark street, gripping the precious briefcase tightly, and realized dizzily that he didn't even know what day it was. He had entered the Mines' building on—was it Saturday?

Yes. Saturday night, and he'd been caught some time early Sunday morning. Was today Sunday night, then? Monday? He didn't know. All he knew was that Kanbeck was dead and the evidence to blast the cartel was in his possession.

"Taxi!"

The cab pulled up. "Where to, officer?"

He gave the address of his office, and sat back. For the first time, he paused to run a hand across his cheek.

There was a thick, wiry growth of beard there. A chill passed through him. How long *had* Kanbeck been interrogating him? How much time had passed while he was doped up with truth-drugs? What day . . .

Innocently, he glanced up at the driver. "Hey, cabbie?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm a little confused on the date—what day is this?"

The cabbie chuckled. "You better lay off that stuff. Today's Monday."

Monday!

Cardiff rocked backward in amazement. Monday!

He forced himself to laugh in pleasant surprise. "Hey, so it is! Guess I just wasn't thinking, there. Of course it's Monday!"

His heart began to pound. So Kanbeck had kept him under drugs for many hours, pumping every bit of information possible from him?

He'd have to work quickly; he had just a few hours to live. Or would Kanbeck's death change things? *No*, he thought. *The future can't be changed. If the viewer says something will happen, it'll*

happen. Hollister had proven that over and over.

He paid the cabbie with some loose change he found in the pockets of the guard's uniform and ran up the stairs to his office. He locked himself in and immediately set to work making photocopies of the documents he'd brought back with him. He had everything, a full, explosive record of the Venus Mines Cartel's operations.

He sorted out the photocopies, gathered one bundle and locked it in his safe, packed another and hid it in Ralph Morley's desk, and sealed the third set in a permoplast wrapper and addressed it to the President. He sent it down the mail chute. Now no matter what happened to him the word would get out.

There, he thought. The job was done. He was prepared to face death, now that the cartel was finished.

But when would death come? How?

He walked inside and snapped on his video to see the news. An excited newscaster was saying, ". . . body of Senator Edmund Cardiff was found this noon. Police believe the Senator was the victim of an assassin. Further bulletins will follow.

Meanwhile, the latest baseball scores . . ."

Cardiff stared at the video as if it had turned to a live rhinoceros there in his office, then reached out and turned the switch. He looked at his hands, touched his fingers to his throat, his chin, his shoulder, feeling himself.

He was solid. He wasn't any ghost.

But what the hell did that newscast mean?

The body of Senator Edmund Cardiff had been found and police were investigating. That was exactly as Holley's machine had predicted it would be. But if that was so—

Who in blazes am I?

He stood frozen in the middle of the office, staring at the neat, uncluttered surface of his desk for a moment, trying to figure things out.

His hand unconsciously slipped into his trouser pocket, and he frowned curiously at the realization that his wallet wasn't where it usually was. Then he re-

membered that he was wearing borrowed trousers.

And then he realized what had happened to his wallet. Suddenly, everything came clear. Cardiff began to laugh uproariously with relief and incredulity.

His wallet—was in Kanbeck's pocket! The pulped corpse found in the street must have been beyond identification—except for the wallet in its pocket, bearing Cardiff's name. And Kanbeck was approximately his size.

Holley's machine had been right. Today was Monday, and the headlines *did* say, "Senator Cardiff's body found." There was no paradox, merely an inaccuracy. There'll be some revisions in the later editions, he thought.

Smiling, he picked up the phone and dialed.

"Police headquarters? This is Edmund Cardiff. *Senator* Cardiff. No, I'm not a crank. I'm just calling to inform you that any reports of my death have been—greatly exaggerated!"

THE END

Bawdy warning seen on the back of a New York truck:

WATCH MY REAR NOT HERS!



THE VENGEANCE OF KYVOR

Synopsis of Previous Installment

DEREK, the Dictator, through treachery, has set up a despotic government on the planet Venus, isolating it from the democracy of Earth, the mother planet. He has fortified Venus against invasion but a single Earth ship managed to get through allowing Dr. Neilson and his scientist wife to reach the jungles of Venus and set up radio communications. He maintains the communication for five years, trying to set up an invasion plan but it is discovered by Derek and he and his wife are murdered. Their small son escapes and is adopted by the Clan of Tivala, native Venusians who live in the jungles. The child thrives and becomes Kyvor the Killer—bent on avenging his parents.

After many tries, Earth gets another small ship through but it crashes in the jungle where Kyvor rescues Lanina Harrison and her brother Wayne. He takes them into the safety of the jungle. The ship has been spotted by Derek's lookouts and a tank expedition is sent out under Major Lyman Reeder to capture the occupants.

In the party are Captain Bock and Lieutenant Dora Summers. These two are drawn together by the fact that Captain Bock thinks Major Reeder is insane. Dora Summers, a nurse, is not sure of this. Then she discovers that a supply of Llomar, a drug the misuse of which can cause madness, has been stolen. Reeder becomes a raging maniac. Someone has poisoned him.

Kyvor has listened to the story of Lanina and Wayne Harrison and plans to help them, but Lanina, in trying to return to the wrecked ship, becomes lost and is faced by a terrible jungle reptile while Kyvor is searching for her. Now for the conclusion of the story.



THE VENGEANCE OF KYVOR

By RANDALL GARRETT

PART II

CHAPTER VI

WHEN the sslis screamed, Lanina Harrison's mind broke from the paralysis of horror that had seized it, and her hand darted to the ray pistol at her side. With the smooth rapidity of long practice, the weapon came up on a line with the reptile-beast's chest. But Lanina did not fire.

She saw that there was no need to; the beast's chest was already pierced by three long darts from Venusian blow-guns. And, even as she

watched, a fourth dart leaped from the surrounding leaves and stuck in the rearing animal. The sslis clawed at his chest and screamed again; but the virulent poison on the long darts worked rapidly, and with a final, mortal roar, the great carnivore toppled from the branch and fell cashing through the greenery to the jungle floor far below.

Then silence reigned all through the surrounding jungle. The roars and screams of the dying sslis had silenced the lesser creatures of the forest.

Lanina looked about her, but she could see nothing. There was, however, no doubt in her mind as to what had happened. Kyvor had given orders to the little, blue-green men of the Clan of Tivala to protect her. Even though they chose to remain invisible, she knew they were all about her in the leafy branches. Feeling much safer than she had before, she reholstered her ray pistol and pressed on through the forest.

It was many hours before she reached the spot where the spaceship had crashed into the limbs of the huge Empire tree, and not once

was there any evidence that she was being followed by the Tivala.

The spaceship was just as she had left it so many days before; the airlock door was gaping open disclosing the darkness within. She decided to look around inside the ship; there might be some few salvagable things which would materially assist in Wayne's comfort—and her own—during his long convalescence. She had watched Kyvor swing above the dizzying heights from the vines that festooned the Empire trees, and she had no doubt that she could perform the feat equally as well. Her training in the Terran Service had been hard and thorough.

Gingerly, she grasped a nearby vine and pulled, testing her weight upon it. It held. Then she estimated the swing between the limb she was on and the open airlock. She knew that all of this would have taken Kyvor only a fraction of a second to compute, but her Earth-trained responses were too slow for such split-second decisions. One slip meant death.

Sure of herself at last, she clamped her hands tightly about the vine and projected herself out over the green



Only a superman would



have risked combat with this hideous beast.

abyss that yawned beneath her. It was a long swing.

Dora Summers heard a scream from the major's tent and began to run toward it. Then she stopped, frightened, as Major Reeder ran wildly from his tent and across the compound toward the gate.

"Open up!" he screamed. "Open up! Open, I say!"

Dora clasped her hands in front of her mouth as she watched the officer run toward the tank where the gate was. The sentry, accustomed to obeying the orders of his superiors, hastily opened the gate, and the major ran out into the darkness of the jungle.

Then she started sprinting again, moving rapidly toward the major's tent. She heard the short, harsh *spit!* of a needle gun just as she neared the entrance to the aluminum-cloth structure. She knew it had not been heard by the others in the camp; the sounds of shouting drowned out the noise of the firing weapon.

Then Captain Bock stepped out of the major's tent, shouting: "Stop the major! Stop him! He's gone insane! He's shot the doctor! Stop him!"

As two of the soldiers raced out of the gate to follow the demented commanding officer, Captain Bock turned to look at Lieutenant Summers. The nurse shrank back, frightened. She could tell by the way he looked at her that he suspected that she knew he had killed Captain Ashley.

The doctor had made the mistake of accusing Captain Bock of poisoning Major Reeder. Bock had been in the tent when the major charged Dr. Ashley; he had, in fact, inflamed the crazed officer's mind against the doctor by telling him that the doctor was attempting to poison him. When Ashley had entered, Captain Bock had grinned sardonically to himself to see his plans working out so well. He had hoped that Major Reeder would actually kill the physician.

But the major had not; he had merely struck the doctor and run out, his disordered mind unable to function properly. The llomar poison had done its work too well.

The doctor, hardly stunned by the officer's blow had sat up and said: "You did this, Captain! I know you put llomar drug in Major Reeder's food!"

Knowing that the doctor would betray him, the captain's cruel mind could think of only one thing. Accordingly, he drew his needler and shot Ashley before he could say another word. He knew that he could blame the murder on Major Reeder.

He had stepped outside, then, and called to the guard. And then he had turned to see Nurse Summers staring at him. Did she know? Had she guessed that he, and not the major, had killed Ashley?

"Did you see what Reeder did?" he asked cautiously.

Dora Summers knew that if she betrayed herself the captain would kill her as surely as he had killed Dr. Ashley. Quickly, she shook her head. "I didn't see it. What happened? Is the doctor hurt?"

"Come inside," Bock said. "Take a look. He's dead."

Nurse Summers looked in through the doorway, but she did not go in. Ashley lay there, a small hole burned through his chest by the deadly ray.

By that time, several of the other officers had come out of their quarters, rushing toward the tent of the commanding officer. The entire

camp was in an uproar by this time, and Captain Bock had to explain the situation to several of the young subalterns who had come up to him, clamoring for an explanation. He told essentially the same story he had told to Dora. Shortly thereafter, the two sentries who had gone out after the major returned through the gate and double-timed toward the captain. They came to a halt and saluted.

"We lost him in the jungle, noble sir," said the lance corporal. "He paid no attention to our calls."

"We couldn't follow him into the forest, noble sir," the private explained.

"It is quite obvious that the major has gone mad," said Captain Bock. "We will wait until dawn and then go on. If he hasn't come back by then, we'll have to assume that he is dead." He paused, and a look of sadness came into his eyes. "If only there were something we could do for him, poor chap."

"There's nothing, sir," said one of the subalterns. "Once he gets into that jungle, he's a dead man."

"We don't dare go out after him," said another. "We couldn't possibly find him."

Captain Bock looked at the

young officer. "We dare not give up hope, Mister Grimes. Organize a patrol, fully armed, and go after him."

The subaltern's eyes opened in surprise, but he said nothing except: "Yes, sir. Right away, sir." Then he turned and strode off.

When the patrol had left, Captain Bock smiled slyly to himself. Whether they returned or not, he knew that they would never find Reeder. Armed only with a needle beam, the major wouldn't last half an hour in that jungle—if that long.

Then the captain's dark eyes slitted. Dora Summers had gone back to the hospital tent. It was time he had a talk with her. He strode over to the hospital tent and rapped on the door. There was no answer. Then he opened the door and looked inside. She was nowhere to be seen.

Frowning, Captain Bock called to a guard, who came running up subserviently.

"Yes, noble sir?" said the guard.

"Search the compound," Bock said. "Lieutenant Summers is missing. Find her and bring her to me."

The guard saluted. "Yes, noble sir." He turned on his heel and left.

The fact that Dora was

missing disturbed the captain. She was necessary to his plans; since the doctor was dead, she would have to be the one to testify that the major was insane, once the expedition returned to Empire City. Without her assistance, it would be difficult to prove that the major had been mad before tonight. She could not have left the compound, of course. Only a madman or a fool would go out into the jungle at night. He waited in his tent while the guards searched for the girl, quite confident that she would accede to his wishes. After all, he knew she was a commoner, not a noble. If he threatened her with disclosure to the authorities, she would not only back up his story of Major Reeder's insanity, but would consent to the other plans he had in mind for her. He smiled to himself as he thought of the young nurse's beauty.

CHAPTER VII

FROM the branches high in the trees above the Imperial Army's bivouac, Kyvor the Killer watched what went on below. When the drug-crazed officer ran out, the jungle-man watched as he ran in a jagged path toward the

nearest tree, circled around it, and disappeared beyond the circle of light shed by the illuminating searchlights of the compound. When he had vanished, Kyvor turned his attention back to the four tanks below. He had no further interest in the officer; anyone foolish enough to expose himself to the Venusian jungle unprotected would not live long.

Beside him, Polthan the Hunter chattered softly in the language of the Tivala. "What do we do next, Mighty Fire? The usual gas-pod bombardment?"

Kyvor smiled. "That, yes. But I think I have discovered another method of destroying the invaders. Suppose we were to drop heavy branches into the compound from up here?"

He turned his eyes to watch the scene below while Polthan thought on his chieftain's suggestion. He could hardly see the faces of those who moved beneath him, so high in the Empire tree was he perched. The tiny figures were like toys who moved mechanically in the panic of the camp.

Meanwhile, Polthan the Hunter thought over what Kyvor had said. Drop heavy

branches? What would that do? Could they kill a few of the Earthmen? Yes. But would not most of them flee to the tanks and thus escape death? Most certainly they would. Then what good would it do?

Shaking his froglike head sadly, Polthan said: "I fear I do not understand your plan, Great Kyvor."

"The carrion beetles," Kyvor said, without looking at the little green man.

A broad smile broke over Polthan's face. The carrion beetles, of course! Who but Kyvor would have thought of such a thing? The carrion beetles which live beneath the mossy covering of the rain-forest floor do not come from their burrows unless there are dead things about into which they can chew their way. An ordinary step, even the great weight of a tank tread, would not disturb those it did not crush, but the heavy slam of a falling body told the little creatures that some animal had fallen from the branches overhead—and a sixty-foot fall would kill almost any tree animal. If the thing did not move, the beetles would crawl from their holes to attack it.

Polthan's broad mouth smiled as he thought of the

confusion that would result in the Earthmen's camp.

"I will find the branch, Polthan," Kyvor said. "You run and find some gas pods. Quickly, now."

Without bothering to answer, Polthan scurried off through the trees.

Kyvor, intent on finding a branch of the proper size to simulate a falling body, did not see, in the camp far below, a girl in a white uniform climb over the body of one of the great tanks and disappear into the jungle. She glanced behind her and ran.

Polthan the Hunter ranged far into the upper terrace of the Venusian jungle searching for the brittle pods of the gas vine. He headed toward one area where he knew the pods would be, a spot high in the trees above where the Earthly spaceship had smashed into the forest. As he neared the spot, his sensitive ears heard the low conversation of his people, so he changed course slightly and within a few moments found the little group surrounding the spaceship.

Mylthat the Trapper and Volthys the Scout were standing on a nearby branch as Polthan swung down from above.

"What are you doing?" Polthan wanted to know.

"The female of Earth left the tree-cavern where Kyvor the Chieftain left her," Mylthat explained. "We were told to watch over her, and we have done so. She has just gone into the sky-vessel. Where is Mighty Kyvor and what is he doing?"

"We followed the Empire Army's trail as they moved along in their great machines, and they are now camped less than an hour's walk from here. Kyvor has decided to harass them with carrion beetles and then drop gas pods upon them. He has sent me to gather the pods." His froglike face broke into a grin as he said: "One of the Earthmen is already accounted for. He went mad and rushed into the jungle. Be not surprised if you hear his death cry in the forest."

Volthys the Scout nodded sagely. "It is well. Should we help you gather the gas pods, Polthan?"

Polthan frowned in concentration. Finally, he said: "The great Kyvor ordered that the female be protected, but he did not say how many were to protect her. If some of you come with me to gather gas pods, and some of you stay here to watch the

female, we can do the work well, and do it as Mighty Kyvor has ordered."

Volthys nodded. "So be it. Come; I will bring others and we will hunt for pods. Mylthat can stay and watch the she."

"So be it," agreed Mylthat.

Thus it was that the Clan of Tivala swung off through the trees to search for gas pods, leaving the sturdy Mylthat to protect Lanina. He sat on the monstrous branch gazing quietly at the blackness of the open airlock, awaiting the reappearance of the girl, little knowing what was taking place within the hull of the broken ship.

Dora Summers knew that her life was not worth a snap of the fingers if Captain Bock ever discovered that she knew that he had been the one to kill Dr. Ashley. Her only way out was to flee to the jungle. The thought frightened her, of course; she had heard of the deadliness of the Venusian rain forest. But she had seen no evidence of its deadliness during the expedition. Not once had they been attacked by any of the denizens of the surrounding jungle.

How she would survive, she had no notion; but she never-

theless knew that her chances would be far better in the forest than they would be with Captain Bock. Now that he was commander of the expedition, he could easily have her killed without calling suspicion on himself. Nurse Summers much preferred the mercies of nature to the mercilessness of Captain Bock.

Thus it was that within a few moments after she left the officer, she had gathered together a few supplies and a blaster rifle and, watching her chance, had climbed over one of the tanks and escaped into the forest.

It was not until she had left the circle of light that illuminated the campsite that she realized the beauty of the rain forest surrounding her. The glowing light from the vine blossoms gave her a dim illumination that was quite sufficient for her to see her way through the forest. Holding her blaster rifle at the ready, she walked onward through the jungle.

Around her rose the great Empire trees, mighty, aloof giants that towered into the glowing haze above her. Beneath her feet, the thick moss of the jungle floor gave slightly, as though she were walking across a gigantic

featherbed. Around her, she could hear the normal noises of the jungle night; whisperings, grunts, and distant screams and roars that made her uneasy with dread.

Several times, she heard the rustle of moving animals near her and pressed herself against the thick, rough bark of a nearby tree. It was only at these times that she realized the true vastness of the comforting Empire trees. The thought that they were the greatest living things in the Solar System, and that, in spite of their vastness and impersonal majesty, they seemed somehow friendly, was of great comfort to her.

As the long Venusian night passed, Dora Summers became more and more weary. Finally, tired and exhausted from her long march, she sought some place where she could safely sleep. At long last, she discovered a dark pit in the thick, heavy bark of one of the gigantic trees and, taking her flashlight from her belt, pointed it at the hole. It was twenty feet off the ground, and the only way she could reach it was to climb the trunk of the tree. Shutting off her light, she grasped the projections of the thick bark and began to climb upwards.

It was like climbing a wall. The Empire tree was a thousand feet thick, and nearly a mile in circumference; up close, it was hard to see that the trunk curved gradually; it looked like a huge, rough wooden wall. When she reached the hole, she held her rifle in one hand while she aimed the flashlight with the other. The hole was empty.

She went in, and leaned back against the rear wall of the tree-cavern, holding her rifle in her lap. For a long time, she could not sleep, but at last drowsiness stole over her. Overcome with fatigue she slept hard.

She did not know how many hours she slept, but she was awakened by a slight sound, and her eyes opened quickly in fear. At first, she could see nothing but a vague shadow. It had grown light outside, and the figure of the intruder was looming large between her and the entrance to the tree-cavern. Instinctively, she clutched for the blaster rifle that she had held in her lap. It was gone!

And then she recognized what it was that had invaded her tree-cavern.

Standing over her, the blaster-rifle in his hands, was Major Lyman Reeder, who

had been driven insane by the llomar drug!

CHAPTER VIII

KYVOR THE KILLER waited patiently for Polthan to return. Time meant nothing to Kyvor; in the jungle there was no need of rushing to meet a time-schedule, as more "civilized" men did. There was plenty of time to attack the Imperial Army bivouac below. Therefore, Kyvor amused himself by watching what went on in the camp. He had lowered himself to a long branch that projected over the tent of the commanding officer, and then, hiding himself in the thick leaves of a vine, had climbed down to within a few feet of the aluminum-cloth shelter.

Long he hung there silently, listening to the conversations that took place beneath him and watching what went on in the camp. When the detail which had been assigned to search for Major Reeder returned, Kyvor smiled grimly as he heard the subaltern's report.

The young subaltern saluted Captain Bock and said: "Sir, we have searched the area thoroughly. Major Reeder's footprints can't be

traced. The moss soon springs back and covers every trace."

Captain Bock was agitated. "I see," he said. "Did you find any other footprints? Lieutenant Dora Summers has been missing for some hours."

The subaltern shook his head. "No, sir. We found no traces of anyone else in the jungle. What happened, if I may ask, sir?"

"She disappeared," said the captain. "I'm wondering if some jungle beast may not have gotten her. I ordered that the camp be searched, but we could find no trace of her. I hardly think that she would have left of her own accord."

Within his scheming mind, Captain Bock actually did not understand why the nurse was missing. For Nurse Summers had made a mistake; she had not realized that she had fooled Captain Bock completely; she had not realized that the officer did not believe that she knew he had killed Captain Ashley.

"How could any beast get inside the compound, sir?" the subaltern asked.

"I don't know," Bock answered, "but I've ordered the guard doubled. We can't afford to be hampered now; the technicians have located the

Earth spaceship. According to their detectors, the vessel is within a few miles of here. It seems to have landed in the branches of one of the trees, because the detectors point to a spot several hundred feet in the air. Therefore, we will move toward it at dawn tomorrow."

The subaltern saluted. "Very well, sir. Shall we prepare now to move?"

Captain Bock nodded. "Get the men ready. We will want to start the tanks as soon as the sun comes up. It's hard to see anything under the darkness of the clouds, but at least the sun supplies some light."

The subaltern turned on his heel and left.

Fifteen minutes later, the temporary camp was full of soldiers moving about, attempting to get everything ready for the morning's march. It was at that point that the turmoil began.

From some place in the trees high above them, a broken branch came hurtling down. It crashed to the ground in the center of the camp, but did not hit anyone. For several seconds, no one paid any attention; then, suddenly, the mossy ground beneath the soldiers seemed to come alive. From all over,

little creatures the size of a man's thumb crawled out of their burrows and headed blindly for the broken branch that had fallen with such force on the turf beneath. When their gnashing mandibles found a soldier's boot, they began to chew, and the Imperial Expeditionary force found themselves beating off the little things everywhere. Then, without warning, something popped in the middle of the camp, and a cloud of acrid, smoky vapor arose from it. Soon, others were falling and popping, filling the air with the poisonous gas. Men began to choke and cough as the fumes entered their lungs, and in the space of a few seconds, the camp was transformed from an orderly military bivouac to a chaotic, milling crowd of men.

In the branches of the trees high above the Imperial Army, Kyvor was directing the placement of the gas bombs. The pods were filled with a gas which was released when the brittle shells cracked as they struck the ground below.

At last, Kyvor whistled shrilly, and the aerial bombardment ceased. The soldiers in the encampment were all

lying on the moss. There was no movement anywhere in the camp.

"Come," Kyvor called to the Clan of Tivala. "We have more work. The Earthmen will bother us no more."

Volthys the Scout picked that moment to run up to Kyvor.

"Mighty Kyvor!" he said breathlessly. "You must come! I saw her! I saw the Good Lady!"

Kyvor stood up from where he had been squatting on a branch and grasped the little blue-green Venusian by the throat. "Do not say such things! I do not like that kind of joke, Volthys!"

"I do not joke, Great Kyvor," the little man chattered. "I do not lie! I saw her! Believe me, I saw her! It was the Good Lady! She is not far away; come! I will show you!"

Kyvor's broad brow frowned in thought. The Scout did not lie; that much, Kyvor knew. But he must be mistaken. Still—

Kyvor decided quickly. If there were anyone left in the Imperial Camp, they could be taken care of later. Right now, this new mystery had to be explored. Calling to the Clan of Tivala to follow him, Kyvor the Killer began

swinging through the trees toward the spot where Volthys the Hunter had claimed to see the Good Lady.

Once inside the airlock of the spaceship, Lanina tied the vine to a nearby stanchion. She had no intention of allowing the thing to swing back and maroon her in the ship again. She did not see the sinuous form of a tree-snake glide silently down the vine after she had secured her end of it—and neither did Mylthat the Trapper, who was, at that moment watching his clansmen swing off into the trees in search of gas pods. When he again returned his attention to the open airlock, all was normal.

Lanina walked into the spaceship, shining her light before her. As she entered the control room, she heard a faint humming noise. Sweeping her beam around the room, she saw almost immediately what it was. One of the instruments on the control panel was still operating; evidently at least part of the power was still on. A red light glowed in one section of the panel. Since she was walking along what was actually one wall of the control room, she did not immediately see what instrument was

calling for attention. The control panel was now running up and down instead of from left to right. Then, as she neared the glittering crimson globe, she saw what it was. Someone was using a detector on the ship!

Carefully, she checked the instrument readings. Whoever had located the ship was using a detector less than two miles to the northeast. That would be the Imperial Army! And that would be where Kyvor was

Unhesitatingly, she turned and walked back toward the airlock. Just as she was about to step up to the port itself, something hissed venomously and a long neck rose up between her and the door. This time, Lanina was not caught napping. Her hand flashed to the holster at her hip and brought out the ray pistol in a single smooth motion. Her finger touched the trigger for the briefest instant.

The tree-snake's triumphant victory-hiss was cut short as the ray beam burned his head off, leaving nothing but a headless, writhing corpse that thrashed like a great whip as death gripped it.

Lanina waited until the snake's convulsions had ceased, and then she stepped over

the sinuous body to the airlock door. Her vine was gone. As he had crawled down it to attack the girl, the tree-snake had loosened it from where the girl had looped it around a stanchion, and it had swung free again. Unless she could get another vine, she would be stranded in the spaceship again.

She was not afraid, however; the little, blue-green men outside would push a vine over to her, if she could only make them understand what it was that she wanted.

She did not realize that only one member of the Clan was left outside. And Mylthat the Trapper could not help her; he was unconscious. The ray beam that had blasted off the head of the tree-snake had narrowly missed Mylthat, who had been standing on a branch outside the airlock. The searing energy of the ray had sizzled viciously past his head, burning the skin, and dropping him where he stood.

Fortunately, he had not fallen off the huge branch, but he was of no use to Lanina. Leaning precariously out of the airlock door, Lanina struggled to attract the attention of Mylthat.

CHAPTER IX

CAPTAIN BOCK lifted himself dizzily to his feet. He shook his head, trying to clear it. What had happened? He put his hand to his face and felt something covering it. Slowly, his memory began to come back.

Something had started popping outside his tent, and he had smelled gas. He had had just enough time to get a gas mask out of the emergency locker when unconsciousness overtook him.

Grasping for the wall, the officer lurched toward the door. He leaned against the door-jamb and gazed out at a scene of carnage. Sprawled all around him lay unmoving men, crumpled in ungainly attitudes on the moss. Nothing moved anywhere.

How long had he been unconscious? Captain Bock looked at his watch and then at the sky. He could not actually see the sky itself, for the leafy branches of the mighty Empire trees screened the ground from the pearly light of the ever-clouded sky, but he could see that the night had gone and day had come.

He could reconstruct what had happened; he had not had enough of the gas to kill him, and his gas mask had

protected him while he lay in a stupor on the floor of his tent. But where had the gas come from? He waited until he could stand up again; then, when his strength had returned, he walked out into the clearing. He almost immediately caught sight of fragments of what looked like thin pieces of wood. He picked one up, and the shard broke between his fingers like broken glass.

Frowning behind the thick goggles of the gas mask, the captain thought over what had happened and tried to link it with something he remembered reading about, years before. Then it came to him. Here and there in the jungle grew a vine that had a peculiar way of protecting its seeds. The seeds grew in pods which were filled with a gas that was generated by the plant. Thus, when the seed-pods fell, they cracked open and filled the air surrounding them with a poisonous vapor. This vapor killed the insects in the moss which might otherwise eat the seed before it could begin to sprout and grow. Somehow, a great many of these pods had been dropped on the camp from the trees above.

Suddenly, Captain Bock realized that he was alone in

the jungles of Venus! Alone! Without the armed might of his men behind him, the captain began to tremble in fear as he looked at the jungle around him. A moss-eating lizard appeared several yards away and looked at the captain through the strong fence that stretched between two of the tanks. The officer did not know it was harmless; he grabbed a rifle that had fallen from one of the soldier's hands and fired at the animal. So shaky was his aim, however, that the deadly ray missed and the frightened moss-eater bounded into the protection of the jungle.

Captain Bock felt cold perspiration form on his brow. He had to get back to Empire City! Gone were any thoughts of returning in glory at the head of a successful expedition; his only thoughts now were to escape the terrifying jungle. Quickly, he ran to the nearest tank and climbed inside. He started the motor and threw the tank in gear. Twisting the controls, he headed the tank back the way the expedition had come.

Or, he thought he did. Actually, his sense of direction had become distorted by fear, and he was heading almost directly away from his goal.

For several minutes, he drove the tank at full speed, as though he were pursued by all the monsters of the Venusian rain forest. He was only brought to a halt when something extraordinary happened ahead of him. He saw something fall from the air above and land on the mossy floor of the jungle. He brought the tank to a full stop when he saw it was a lovely young, blond-haired girl. The carrion beetles were already coming out of their burrows when Captain Bock jumped out of the tank and ran out to get her. He reached her first.

Now that his fear had cooled somewhat, the Imperial officer's shrewd, calculating mind was working again. He knew that the girl could only be one of the people who had come in the Earth ship. If he could bring her back as a prisoner, with a story of how he had captured her himself after the entire expedition had been wiped out to a man, he would be even more of a hero—

The carrion beetles scattered at his approach, for, in spite of their vicious jaws, they will not attack anything that is living and moving. Some few took a snap at his

boots and began to chew, but they did not hang on long.

The captain lifted the girl up and took her to the tank. He put her in a seat in the rear, tied her up, and started the tank moving again.

As he moved through the trees, Kyvor said softly to the little green man beside him: "Volthys, if you are lying, I shall cut out your tongue and feed it to the bat-lizards!"

"I do not lie!" Volthys chattered in protest. "The mighty Kyvor knows I do not lie! She was near this spot. I saw her and ran to tell you. I—"

He stopped then, because the hissing scream of a mad-dened sslis echoed through the leafy jungle.

"Hush!" said Kyvor. "Something is wrong here! The sslis is below us!"

"Aye," said Polthan from a nearby branch. "And the sslis does not hunt on the ground."

"Come!" Kyvor shouted and swung quickly in the direction from which the sound had come. If there were a strange girl in the jungle, it would only be she who was being attacked by the reptilian carnivore. No other prey of the sslis would be on the ground.

But, as he approached, Kyvor saw it was not a girl. Instead, a single man was standing, his back against a tree, a long stick in his hand. In front of him snarled the huge sslis. Each time the reptile lunged, the stick struck out to meet it, striking the savage snout and causing the beast-lizard to retreat.

Kyvor watched for several minutes, and his admiration for the man below began to grow. Never had he seen a so-called civilized man display such courage and skill in the face of certain death. Unarmed and nearly naked though he was, the man nevertheless seemed determined to live in spite of the odds against him. But he was not a young man, there were traces of gray in the hair at his temples, and his body showed that, although it had once been that of an athlete, it was not in fine trim. Gradually, the man began to weaken, and the carnivore's lunges came closer and closer.

Kyvor made his decision. No man, no matter who he was, deserved to die when he could display such bravery in the face of death.

Kyvor the Killer grasped a long vine and launched himself through the air toward

the snarling beast-lizard below. Just as the great sslis lifted himself for a final, fatal attack on the beleaguered man, Kyvor's mighty body struck him, bowling him over from the force of the blow.

Kyvor locked his legs about the beast's abdomen and curled one powerful arm around the tough, leathery throat. There had been no time to pull the long knife from the scabbard at his waist, and the twisting and rolling of the sslis did not permit him to do so, even now. Over and over the reptile rolled, trying to dislodge the man-thing from its back.

But Kyvor knew that to be shaken off meant death. Grimly he hung on, fighting to get one arm locked around the back of the beast-lizard's neck. At last, he held the sslis's head in a hammer lock. Back and back he forced the head, while the reptile roared and hissed in rage and pain. Kyvor's powerful muscles tensed more and more, increasing the pressure. Suddenly, there issued from the throat of the carnivore a horrendous scream—then there was a loud *crack!* and the animal fell, unmoving, to the moss, its neck broken.

Kyvor pushed the great

body off himself, and as he stood up, the man who had been beating off the reptile with a stick walked over to him, his hand outstretched.

"Sir," said the stranger, "I do not know who you are, but you have saved my life. That was the most magnificent piece of work I have ever had the honor to see. Whatever you may ask of me, I will gladly risk my life to do it, as you have risked yours for me."

Kyvor accepted the outstretched hand and found that the grip was firm and friendly. The gray eyes that looked steadily into Kyvor's own reflected the intelligence of the brain behind them.

"Your own defense was a measure of your courage," the fire-haired giant said. "I am called Kyvor. And you?"

The man drew himself up proudly. "Major Lyman Reeder, of his Imperial Majesty's army, at your service, sir."

No surprise registered on Kyvor's face; he had known that the man must be one of the Imperial soldiers, although he had not realized that it was the commanding officer of the expedition. It might, perhaps, have been better to allow the man to die at the mercy of the sslis,

but Kyvor would never have done that. Courage should always be rewarded with courage.

Before Kyvor said anything, Volthys the Scout dropped down from the trees, sliding down a thick vine.

"I found her, Mighty Kyvor," he said excitedly. "I found the Good Lady. She's asleep in a tree-cavern not far from here. She's all dressed in white, though, and she wears the insignia of the Empire, which the Good Lady would never wear."

Kyvor's eyes narrowed in thought, and he turned to

look at the major. That officer had drawn back at the appearance of the green man, and held his stick again at the ready, in case of attack. The flame-haired giant, ignoring the major's stance, said: "Do you happen to know a young woman with black hair and brown eyes who would be wearing the uniform of a nurse in the Imperial Army?"

The major nodded. "That would be Lieutenant Dora Summers. Why?"

"She's in a tree-cavern near here. What would she be doing out in the jungle, away from your camp?"



Discipline was gone—sanity had vanished—only murder remained.

Major Reeder shook his head. "I don't know. You see, I—I've been ill. I don't know what happened. I can only remember very dimly that I ran away from my men and—and I ran into the jungle and tore my clothes off. I only came out of it a short time ago, but since then, my brain seems to be clearer than ever before. Frankly, I do not understand it."

"Nor do I," Kyvor said. "However that may be, I would like to talk to that girl. I wonder if it wouldn't be better if you woke her up; seeing me or my friends might shock her."

Major Reeder nodded in agreement. "Whatever you say, Kyvor. Where is the girl?"

The jungle-man spoke to the green Venusian, and the little man pointed toward a tree some distance away, while chattering in a tongue unfamiliar to the Imperial officer.

Kyvor turned back to the major and said: "Come; I'll show you."

They walked toward the great tree, and as they approached it, Kyvor pointed toward a dark scar about twenty feet off the ground. "She's in there," he said. "Can you climb up?"

"I'm sure I can," Major Reeder replied.

CHAPTER X

WHEN Dora Summers awoke, she realized instantly that the man standing over her was not the same Major Reeder that she had known before, and when he spoke, she was sure of it.

"How are you, Lieutenant?" he asked in a kindly voice. "I picked up the blaster rifle because I was afraid you might shoot before you saw who I was. Or, perhaps—" He smiled. "—perhaps even after, considering the way I've treated you in the past."

"You recovered from the llomar drug!" the girl said. "Why, that's wonderful! Then you've—" She broke off as another figure appeared in the entrance to the tree-cavern, a tall, golden-skinned, flame-haired young man who stopped and looked at her for a long moment without saying anything.

"Who—who is this?" the nurse asked.

"He calls himself Kyvor," the major explained. "He risked his life to save mine; I am eternally indebted to him."

"You were about to say

something about the llomar drug," Kyvor said. "What was it?"

"Captain Bock stole some of the drug from the medical supplies," the girl explained. "He gave an overdose to the major in order to drive him insane and kill him. The captain wanted to take command of the expedition, so that he would get all the credit when we returned to Empire City.

"Llomar usually kills when given in an overdose. But in about one case out of a thousand, the insanity wears off after a few hours, and the patient becomes more sane than he ever was before in his life. No one knows for sure how it works."

"I see," Major Reeder said softly. "That explains why I understand many things more clearly now. I can see the pettiness and small-mindedness of the Imperial Court; I can understand the fear and stupidity that hangs over the city like the clouds. And I can see the insanity and cruelty of the whole system of government." He closed his eyes. "I can't go back there; I have no place in such a society any longer."

Kyvor looked at the man for a long time before he said anything. He was judging and weighing the man's

character. At long last, he said: "Sit down, both of you. There are some things you should know." He looked first at the girl. "You are Dora Summers, you say. Isn't your real name Dore Larsen?"

The girl's hand flew to her mouth in astonishment. "How did you know?"

"Your father's name was Edmond Larsen," Kyvor continued. "He was executed ten years ago for treasonal utterances against the Emperor. Your mother married Colonel Summers of the Imperial Army, giving him a false story and background. She didn't want anyone to know you were a commoner. Summers accepted her story and gave you his name, but you've been afraid ever since that someone would find it out."

"How do you know all this?" the girl repeated.

"Your father was my uncle," Kyvor said. "My mother was Elaine Larsen. You look a great deal like her; that's why I was so surprised when I first saw you. My friends, the Tivala, thought you *were* my mother, whom they called the Good Lady. They are simple folk, and believe the evidence of their senses rather than their memories; they thought you were Elaine

Larsen, even though she has been dead for thirteen years."

Major Reeder had been watching the nurse while Kyvor spoke, and when the golden giant had finished, the major put his hand on the girl's shoulder. "Don't worry about me, my dear. Your secret is safe with me."

"I am sure of it," Kyvor said. "Else I would not have told her in your presence. I trust you, Major, but before I tell you anything more, I must ask you a question."

"You said that you could see the corruption of the Empire, where you were blind to it before. Major, how would you like to help bring the Empire down around the ears of Derek the Second?"

There was silence in the tree-cavern for a long time. The major gazed out at the jungle, his mind in deep thought. Neither the jungle-man nor the nurse spoke, not wanting to break the major's introspection.

Finally the major looked at Kyvor, and his gray eyes were calm. "I gave my oath to uphold the Emperor," he said. "And for no other man would I break that oath, even though I felt it to be in error. But I owe you a debt I can never repay, Kyvor; and be-

sides, I have a feeling that you may succeed. I'll help you. What are your plans?"

"My name, the name my parents gave me, is Glen Neilson. Perhaps you have heard of Dr. Simon Neilson? He was my father," Kyvor began. He went on to explain that two Earth agents had landed and had plans for contacting Earth. With aid inside Empire City, it would be possible to destroy the Empire and liberate the enslaved commoners.

"But how can I help?" the major asked when Kyvor was through.

"It will be simple, Major. Your camp was gassed last night; my friends and I attacked it. Usually, we tear down the fences afterwards and leave the men to the wild beasts. But we did not do so this time because we were told that the girl—Dora, here—was in the jungle. The gas does not kill; it merely puts men into a deep sleep. With the protection of the fence and tanks around them, they will be safe. Most of them are probably awake by now."

"All you have to do is take command again, arrest this Captain Bock, and then lead them to where the spaceship is. You, yourself, can inspect it. You can then report that

no one lived through the crash, that the occupants have probably been eaten by wild beasts.

"Then you will simply go back to Empire City and resume your old way of life until I contact you again."

"I see," said Major Reedcr. "Very well; it sounds like a good plan to me. I'll do it." Then he looked at the nurse. "I'll tell them that you came after me when the captain poisoned me. That will account for your absence."

Dora Summers nodded and smiled. "We'd better get started, though," she cautioned. "Captain Bock may be up to even more of his nefarious schemes."

Kyvor rose to his feet. "Come," he said.

As they neared the spot where the encampment was, they heard the sound of blaster fire, and the major broke into a run. Kyvor took to the trees, in order to travel faster. He could move through the lower terrace of the rain forest much more rapidly than a man could walk along the mossy floor.

When he finally came to the camp, he was surprised by what he saw. One of the tanks had been driven off, leaving a hole in the defenses

of the compound. Several of the soldiers were firing at a group of animals which had wandered into the area. None of the animals were dangerous, but the soldiers were not familiar with the jungle fauna, and so could not tell the claws of the moss-diggers from the claws of a carnivore.

It was at that moment that Mylthat the Trapper scurried up to Kyvor's side. There was a nasty burn along one side of his head.

"Mighty Kyvor," he gasped. "I have been searching for you for hours, it seems."

"What is it, Mylthat?" the jungle-man asked.

Mylthat explained about the golden-haired she. He told how the girl had gone to the spaceship and how he had happened to get the burn on his head.

"—and then, Mighty Fire-Hair, I awoke just as she became desperate. The vine was only a few feet out of her reach, so she jumped for it. But it gave a little, and, as she slid down, it gave more. She slid down the vine for over a hundred feet before it finally tore loose and dropped her to the ground. I could do nothing for her; I was too dizzy from the hurt of the death-gun.

"As she lay there, one of

the rumbling machines of the Empire men stopped, and a man got out and put her inside. Then the machine went away."

At the thought of the beautiful, blonde Lanina in the hands of the murderous Captain Bock, a low growl came from Kyvor's throat. He would have been well content to allow the officer to die by himself in the jungle, but this was a different matter.

Without another word, he leaped to his feet and grasped a vine. Then he vanished in a long, swinging arc.

CHAPTER XI

AS MAJOR REEDER ran up to the camp, a young subaltern ran out to meet him.

"Sir!" he said, "are you all right? Something happened during the night. We were gassed, and when we awoke, we found that someone had taken a tank, and Captain Bock was missing."

"It was the captain who took the tank," Reeder said coldly. "He has proven himself not only a traitor, but a thief. It was he who drugged my coffee and made me seem insane."

"And it was he who murdered Captain Ashley,"

Nurse Summers said. "I was just outside his tent when he did it."

"Mister Grimes," the major addressed the subaltern, "get the men organized quickly. We must go to the Earth spaceship and investigate, then take our report back to the Emperor."

"I hardly think we need worry about Captain Bock. If he survives, he can only go to Empire City, where he will immediately be arrested as a traitor and a murderer. If he does not survive—" Major Reeder shrugged. "Justice will be served in either case."

The subaltern saluted. "Very well, sir. We'll be ready to go very soon."

High in the upper terraces of the Venusian rain forest, moving with the utmost speed of which he was capable, Kyvor raced after the retreating tank. He moved alone; at top speed, he outdistanced even the quick-moving Polthan. No Venusian could hope to keep up with the flame-haired giant if Kyvor chose to outpace his green-skinned friends.

Occasionally, he dropped to the lower branches to check the trail of the moving tank; human footprints faded rapidly in the springy moss

of the jungle floor, but the treads of a heavy tank were more permanent. His keen eyes needed only the merest hint to follow a trail, and, as he moved onward, the trail became fresher and clearer—he was gaining!

Lanina felt a rough hand shaking her.

"Wake up!" said a harsh voice. "Come! Wake up!"

She shook the sleep from her weary brain and sat up in the cramped seat of the tank. Captain Bock was glaring at her from the front seat. "Wake up!" he repeated.

Lanina looked at him coldly without saying anything. She wriggled a little, trying to make herself more comfortable; for two days, her hands had been locked together by magnetic handcuffs, twisting her arms cruelly behind her back, but not once had she given any indication of discomfort to her captor.

Captain Bock looked untidy and unkempt; his beard bristled through an ugly coating of dust, grease, and perspiration, which did nothing to improve his foul disposition.

"Get out," he said sharply. "Something's happened to the

tank. The motor refuses to turn over. We'll have to fix it."

Lanina shrugged her shoulders contemptuously. "How am I to help you with handcuffs around my wrists?"

He grasped her roughly by the shoulder. "Don't argue! When I get you back to Empire City, I'll show you that you can't argue with an Imperial officer! If it weren't for the fact that the Emperor would punish me if I didn't bring you in in perfect condition, I'd—"

"I'm sure you would," Lanina cut in. "You're not a man; you're a beast."

Bock snarled and lashed out with his open palm. There was a sharp *crack*. Lanina's cheek flamed red from the sting of the cowardly blow.

"Now get out!" he shouted. "We have work to do!"

Wordlessly, Lanina obeyed. What else could she do? If she refused, she knew full well that the sadistic captain would beat her into insensibility. She had been with him in the tank for two days, and she knew how his twisted mind worked.

When they were both outside of the vehicle, the officer unlocked the engine compartment of the tank, disclosing

the turboelectric motor that lay within. After several minutes of inspection, he said: "The injector valves have become fouled. We'll have to change them."

"If you think I'm going to help you," Lanina said in an icy voice, "you're insane."

Again he turned on her, fury burning in his hate-filled eyes. Mouthing foul oaths, he slapped her again and again, forehand and backhand, until her senses began to reel. She fell to the mossy ground, and he stood over her, glaring down. He started to say more, but, quite suddenly, he glanced up, as though he had seen something out of the corner of his eye. He looked up, and an expression of terror crossed his face.

His hand moved toward his holster, but he was too slow and too late. The huge form of a giant sslis leaped upon him from the branches of a nearby tree. With a terrified scream, Captain Bock tried to turn and run. The sslis missed its target by a few feet, clawing the captain's arm. In a panic of fear, the Imperial officer turned and ran toward the jungle. The sslis snarled viciously and bounded after the fleeing craven.

At that moment, Kyvor the Killer was only a quarter of a mile away. He heard the hunting cry of the sslis, and knowing that he was very close to the tank he had been following for so long, he redoubled his efforts, increasing his speed through the jungle.

At last, he came upon the clearing where the tank had stalled. There, just outside the open door, lay the unconscious figure of Lanina.

Within seconds, Kyvor had dropped to the ground, and had clasped the girl in his arms. "Lanina! Lanina! What's happened?"

Groggily, she opened her eyes. When she saw the bronzed giant who was holding her, she smiled and threw her arms about him. Then, suddenly she pushed him away. "I'm sorry," she said. "I forgot that you belong to another."

"Another?" Kyvor frowned. "What are you talking about?"

"Don't pretend," she said. "I saw the photograph of the dark-haired girl in your treecave."

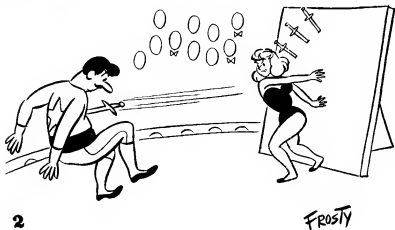
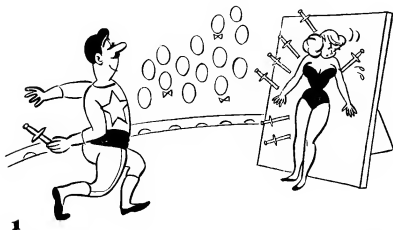
For a moment, Kyvor's frown persisted, then a smile broke over his face. "Good heaven, girl! That picture is twenty years old! That's my mother!"

A sudden joyous light burst into the girl's eyes as her arms clasped him again.

In the distance, they could hear the satisfied grunts of

the ssliis as it fed gruesomely on its human prey. Captain Bock would never be a menace to anyone again.

THE END



HELL'S OWN PARLOR

By PAUL DALLAS

Exactly where is this place called Hell? Down below? Not necessarily. It may be right here — now — all around us. And each of us may be acting as our own judges, jurors, and executioners — day after day.

THE pressure was enormous and it was impossible to withstand it. Even the mighty clyptic muscles, tensed though they were in fright, resisted only briefly and then fell back with a shudder as their wings were torn from them. The leg muscles, being weaker, knotted in pain and shivered as the legs were ripped two at a time from their moorings. Finally the wingless, legless body of the mutilated fly was thrown onto the tabletop, where it buzzed in helpless shock.

Orman Grayson gazed with satisfaction at his handiwork, carefully brushing the loose legs and gauzy wings from his fingertips. They showered gently on the impotent body of the fly, whose

desperate buzzing continued to broadcast the horror of the disaster which had engulfed it. It was a housefly, and Orman noted with interest the jagged bright blue mark on its back that formed an almost perfect Z. He poked at it with a stubby forefinger and sent the limbless body skidding across the polished mahogany.

The suffering of the truncated insect did not register particularly in Orman's mind, but for the moment he revelled in the power he had just demonstrated so convincingly. Right now, as far as that fly was concerned, and, for that matter, as far as Orman was concerned, Orman Grayson was God. The tabletop was his universe, and it suited his pleasure to



A man's sins will return to haunt him—come what may.

have it inhabited by this one fly; he could have others if he wished. In fact, it was for the purpose of stocking his various universes that he strung flypaper in likely places around his apartment. Elsewhere—in his office, for instance—he relied on the surprising speed with which his short, pudgy arms could sweep through the air, enabling him to catch his subjects on the wing.

Orman sat back and clasped his hands placidly, observing the futile little twitchings of his maimed vassal. His mind opened, taking in the larger situation. It was not easy to be God. In order to use power you had to acquire it first; and although he was now forty-five years old, he had really spent only the last twenty years gathering and building his power.

The idea of a benevolent God was ridiculous—the blathering of uninformed idiots. He himself had believed it for twenty-five years. His brother Tom, ten years older, could make one believe that God was all kindness and love. A righteousness softened by a deep sense of understanding had combined to make Tom a very unusual type of cop; unfortunately, these qualities had

also limited his rise in the force to the rank of detective-sergeant. His understanding had driven him to spending much of his off-time helping the little nobodies whose collisions with the machinery of law enforcement became large tragedies to families too poor and too unimportant to merit official consideration. His righteousness had limited his income to the totally inadequate salary of a detective-sergeant in the mid-thirties. And since he wouldn't take graft, he couldn't be reached by the mob and their hired politicians. Except that one day they reached him the hard way. "Unknown gunman kills cop," the papers said. And since no one knew just how he met his death, Tom's wife didn't even get much of a medal, although he was buried with the honors due a detective-lieutenant.

Orman blinked his eyes, dispelling his reminiscences and concentrating once again on his universe and subject. The fly with the blue Z stilled buzzed intermittently. Orman picked it up, listened to the noise and felt the vibration. Holding it firmly but gently between thumb and forefinger, he raised his other

hand and expertly flicked off its head. Neatly, he picked up the tiny head and dropped it in the ashtray. Then, drawing a sharp breath, he pressed his thumb and forefinger together viciously, instantly squeezing all life out of his subject.

Rubbing his fingers together, he deposited the flattened remains of the fly in the ashtray next to the head. He drew a tissue from his jacket pocket, wiped his fingers and threw the soiled paper into the wastebasket. Then, he heaved a sigh and stood up. Much as he despised it, he would have to spend an hour in his office now. An hour in the morning to get things rolling, an hour in the evening to sign papers and check the day's production, were the bare minimum, he felt. He straightened his tie, adjusted his cuffs, and strode from the room.

Orman walked purposefully through the main office towards his own inner sanctum. His face wore a preoccupied, distant look, and he barely nodded his acknowledgment to the chorus of "Good afternoon, Mr. Grayson," that sounded as he passed each desk. You couldn't head up an impor-

tant organization by backslapping and being a good guy; prestige, respect, power—these were the qualities that counted.

He nodded briefly to his secretary at her desk just outside his office, and entered. He sat down behind his desk and his eyes darted across its surface, taking in the details. The outgoing basket was empty. The incoming file contained the two folders on the Melas Company which he had requested. In dead center, a neat stack of freshly typed letters waited for his signature. All was in order, as he knew it would be.

The intercom box winked at him and he depressed a tiny lever.

"Yes, Miss Adams?"

"Mr. Hinkley would like to see you, Mr. Grayson."

Orman consulted his watch. "I'll see him in exactly six minutes," he answered, and closed the circuit.

It was a typical maneuver—clever. To begin with, if his time was to be considered valuable by his employees, they must know that they couldn't just walk in whenever they felt like it. And in this particular case, Orman knew that Hinkley wanted a favor. The six minutes Hink-

ley would be kept waiting would turn him to jelly. Some men might be able to spend the time marshalling arguments and compelling reasons to present to the Boss; but not Hinkley. He was in his middle fifties, had been with this one company since its inception, and was therefore unemployable elsewhere. His wife's illness—she must have been ailing for almost two years now—had doubtless exhausted whatever reserve of cash the man had possessed; and now he wanted a favor. Orman knew what the request would be—Miss Adams was very good about that sort of thing—and he knew how desperate was Hinkley's position. The six minutes would turn him to jelly.

He checked off the remaining seconds and as the last second ticked away, there was a knock on his door.

"Come in," he said.

The door opened and a slight man with thin, graying hair came through. The first impression he gave was that he was unutterably weary.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Grayson," he said. "May I see you for a minute?"

"Certainly, certainly. What

can I do for you? How is your wife?"

"There's been no change, sir. As a matter of fact, that's what I wanted to talk to you about."

"Well, if there's anything I can do to help, Hinkley, just let me know."

"Thank you, sir, that's very kind of you." The small man hesitated and cleared his throat. "Well, sir, Dr. Kelly wants her to go to Rochester to be examined at the Clinic. They may be able to help."

"Sounds like a very fine idea," Orman said.

"Yes, sir, I believe it is, but you see, what with the trip both ways, and her stay there, the whole thing will take a month. Since she's practically helpless by herself, I'll have to go with her."

"Yes, of course," Orman sympathized. "And I can tell you, we'll miss you. The office won't be the same without you."

"Thank you, sir, that's very kind of you."

Orman smiled and waved away the gratitude. "Not at all," he went on. "I'll have the cashier make up your pay. What with vacation time, separation pay and whatever you get back from the pension fund, it should come to a tidy little sum."

"Separation pay?" Hinkley asked. He was confused.

"Why, of course. After your years of service, you don't think we'd let you quit without showing some measure of our appreciation. You'll get two weeks pay."

Hinkley was stunned. "Quit?" he asked, his voice rising to a squeak. "I had no intention of quitting, Mr. Grayson. I just thought that . . ."

Orman's eyebrows plainly showed his surprise. "Not quitting? But Hinkley, I thought you said your wife would have to go away for a month, and that you were going with her?"

"I did, sir." Hinkley was desperately seeking to hold together the jagged edges of reality. "But I meant that since my vacation is coming up anyhow, I might just add two weeks to that, sir, and . . ."

Orman shook his head sadly. "I'm sorry," he said, "I misunderstood. This makes my problem very difficult. You see, I had intended to ask you to forego your vacation this year. The files are badly in need of a complete overhauling, and we just can't put it off any longer."

"But, Mr. Grayson, I over-

hauled the entire system last year instead of taking my vacation."

Orman touched his fingertips together. "Well, there you are," he said with a sigh, "you see how quickly they can get out of order. If you were to leave now, I'd just have to get another man to replace you. As you know, Hinkley, we always hire on a permanent basis—so I simply don't see any place you would fit into when you come back."

Hinkley squirmed uncomfortably. "But, Mr. Grayson, I never thought of quitting. I couldn't possibly quit now. Not with all the expenses I've had. If I could even have one week extra . . ."

Orman raised his hand, silencing the frightened man. "Come, come, Hinkley. I realize your position, and it's your decision to make. If you want to stay on and handle the overhaul yourself, why, that would be fine—but if you feel you'd rather have the money, we'll arrange it that way. As a matter of fact, considering the unusual conditions, I think we can make your separation pay three weeks."

"Oh, no, sir," Hinkley cried out in alarm, "why, that wouldn't even begin to pay for . . . I'm sorry, sir,"

he continued, getting a hold on himself. "I'll be glad to work through my vacation and straighten out the files," he concluded in defeat.

Orman smiled pleasantly. "Well, that's fine," he said. "Everything's settled then."

Hinkley nodded wordlessly and turned to leave. His hand was on the doorknob when Orman's voice came to him.

"Oh, and Hinkley. If there's any way I can help, let me know, won't you?"

"Yes, sir," Hinkley said. "Thank you, sir. That's very kind of you."

Orman watched the door close behind the beaten man and sighed heavily. It was a strain coming in to the office every afternoon. But there were compensations.

He had eaten on the way home. Now the evening was his to relax. He was stretched out in his adjustable armchair. The paper lay open on his outstretched legs, and his arms were at his side. He wasn't dozing exactly, just letting his thoughts drift.

In the little dining area, a bit to the left and behind him, Peter was singing at the top of his shrill voice. Peter was a canary. An extraordinary bird, Orman mused, closing

his eyes. He was easily frightened; a short stick thrust between the bars of his cage and poked at him would send him into a frenzy of fluttering and alarmed peeps. He lost dignity, feathers and wind in his terror. And yet, when things had calmed down, he would chirp and sing as loudly as ever. Magnificent spirit; it would take a while to crush.

The song came clear and sweet from the cage. And then clearer and sweeter than Orman had ever heard it before. While he listened to the rich tones which seemed to fill the entire room, deep within the framework of music a thin voice seemed to be speaking words.

He was so enveloped by the beauty of the canary's song, and he became aware of the voice so gradually, that it did not surprise him at all to hear it. Instead, with his eyes closed, he simply listened, as the voice gained in volume and the singing faded into the background. Finally the words themselves became distinguishable, and Orman found himself listening to them with interest. There was an indescribable agony in the voice, and the words seemed to be a sort of prayer.

". . . and so, I beseech you,

release me from this vale of suffering. Though great have been my wrongdoings, surely, I implore, my punishment has been as great. I knew so little, and now I have learned and endured so much. Hear my plea, I beseech you, and take me to your fold."

Suddenly, Orman was jarred loose from his reverie. He jumped. It was the phone; its harsh bells destroyed the pleasantness of the mood. He got up to answer. In his haste, he stumbled, barking a shin. He swore softly, paused to collect himself, and then lifted the instrument. It was the wrong number. For a moment, he was furious, and teetered on the edge of throwing a big fat tantrum, but then he remembered the business about the canary singing and the voice that had seemed to grow from the song. Had he dozed off? Had the voice been his own, echoing in a dream? No. No, he was sure that he had been awake. He had just happened to tune in on something that he had had no previous experience with. There could be no other explanation.

To settle the matter, he walked quickly to the dining area and Peter's cage. The bird was silent now. It had to be; it was dead. Lying on

the bottom of the cage, limp and very dead.

Orman was annoyed; this put a crimp into some few plans he had. He opened the door of the cage, gently lifted the still warm body and carried it out to the kitchen. He deposited it in the garbage pail, and that was that. But that night, Orman dreamed of Peter and his singing and his strange voice. And it bothered him.

As the cold, blue light of dawn oozed into his room, he dreamed that Tom awoke him as he used to so long ago, and he opened his eyes with a smile. His features were pleasant, almost boyish, as he lazily opened his eyes and continued the dream in the softly lit room. Tom would have the coffee hot, and soon they would take turns in the shower. These early morning breakfasts were great morale builders. Tom took the time to discuss any problems which troubled his younger brother, and he gave not only good solid advice, but real help. No worry was so trivial that Tom couldn't devote some time to it. It made each day start out bright and fresh and easy to conquer.

Orman's remaining senses slowly stretched and awoke

and became aware, and the stern reality of the day at hand filtered through. A humming sound and a fluttering came from the window; raising his head, he looked in that direction. One of the strips of flypaper had caught a large night-moth. It was strong enough to swing the long strip from side to side, but it was caught fast.

Orman let his head fall back and closed his eyes. He was not yet ready to face the normal grind and crush of the day. The humming of the captive moth lulled him back toward the shadow of the receding night, and he took advantage of the soothing sound to relax for a further few moments before rising. The noise spiralled into his ear and filled his consciousness, and down within the center of the low notes, a voice spoke words. Slowly, monotonously, the voice droned on, until Orman found himself listening, eavesdropping on the supplication of the frantic moth.

"... although I have richly deserved the sentence passed upon me, I humbly implore you to direct the mortal Orman Grayson, to whom I have been assigned, to act without undue delay, so that

I may be released to your command, where I so earnestly long to be."

At the mention of his name, Orman sat up stiffly; then, remembering how he had lost contact with Peter when the phone rang suddenly, he deliberately forced himself to relax.

Casually, moving slowly and easily, he drew back the covers and got to his feet. He padded gently over to the corner where the trapped moth fluttered on the sticky paper and was relieved to find, as he bent forward to inspect his catch, that within the humming and the noise of the frantically beating wings, the voice was still distinguishable. Not that he heard this as he heard ordinary conversation. Rather he sensed the words; they registered as if they had been heard.

As he stared at the insect, the words stopped, but the feeling of being in tune with something strange continued, and he was puzzled. He looked the moth over carefully in the shallow light. It was nothing unusual; just a moth.

"Well, now, I wonder why you seemed to mention my name," he mused.

"Because I have been assigned to you, Orman Gray-

son." The answer was clear, although again he could not hear any actual words.

His eyes narrowed in surprise, and he bent forward until he was in danger of pressing his face against the gluey paper.

"Did you speak to me?" he asked aloud.

There was no answer. Doubt seeped into his mind, and the silence which filled the room allowed it to grow until Orman was almost sure that he had been the victim of a daydream. He was about to shrug the matter off and return to bed, when a thought occurred to him, and he decided it was worthwhile making a test. Keeping his lips firmly pressed together, he formed the words in his mind, trying through sheer thinking power to broadcast his meaning. After several tries, he found he was able to create an idea in his mind without using words, even mentally. It took a great deal of concentration.

"Did you speak to me?" he thought.

"I only answered you." The reply flashed into his consciousness.

"Well, now, we're getting somewhere," he thought with satisfaction. "What do you

mean when you say you've been assigned to me?"

"I have been given this form and this life, which in turn have been placed in your hands. This is my atonement for the transgressions of my previous form and life."

"Do you mean to say that you are not just an ordinary moth?" Orman formed the question excitedly.

"I am a moth," came the answer.

"Yes, yes, but you were not always a moth, is that it?"

"Of course not; I was a mortal, as you are now."

"Then you died and came back as a moth?" Orman found this telepathic conversation stimulating.

"There is no death and no coming back. I merely was transferred into another form."

"And you say you were assigned to me. Who assigned you?" he asked.

"You are on the lists of those who can provide atonement."

"No, really?" Orman was pleased at the news. This confirmed an opinion he had long held that his was a power and a destiny beyond the common means of ordinary people. "So I am your master," he mused.

"You are not my master, Orman Grayson, you are my punishment," the moth said.

"Well, there is very little difference as I see it," Orman replied. "And since you were no doubt a very wicked man, I shall see that you are properly punished. After all, it is my duty."

"It is ordered."

He went to his dresser and returned carrying a pair of scissors. With these, he carefully snipped the flypaper just above and below the place where the moth was held fast. Disregarding the piece that fell to the floor and stuck to the carpet, Orman carried his prize out of the room and into his study. There he took a sheet of heavy white paper from a desk drawer and carefully placed the small sticky ribbon onto it. Switching on the bright desk lamp, he sat down and contemplated his handiwork.

The thought that he had been designated as an official hell swirled through his mind. He wondered briefly whether he had been born specifically with this role in view, or whether he had earned the position; not that it was an important point, because the main thing was that he was so appointed.

Still, it would be nice to think that he had had some part in earning the distinction. For the first time since the horrible night Tom had been viciously cut down from behind, he felt a fullness of purpose to his life.

"Now then," he said, addressing his mind to his victim, "there are things you must tell me. First of all, what is your name?"

"You can know me only as you see me."

"So." Apparently there were rules with which he was not familiar. He pressed gently on the moth's chest with the point of a pencil, sending the insect into a convulsion of frenzied activity. The light, reflecting deep within the moth's eyes, gave them a breathtaking beauty. He dug with the pencil point a few times, to make the head twitch and squirm, catching the light and illuminating the pinpoints of amber.

"You know," he said, "it doesn't seem altogether fair to me. I mean that the punishment for a whole lifetime should be condensed into fifteen or maybe thirty minutes. When I think of the many insects I have spent less than five minutes on, I'm afraid I did not do justice."

"You do not understand time," the moth said, its message carrying no trace of the suffering it was undergoing. "Even a lifetime may be a few hours, or many years, or even centuries. A clock tells you nothing of time, but reveals only the functioning of a piece of machinery built to work a certain way. If it runs fast or slow, an adjustment is required—but when it runs properly, it merely marks off the hours of the days that are given you. Those you cannot adjust. But a day or an hour or a minute carries as much time as has been packed into it, and this can vary. Your thirty minutes can be an eternity."

"I suppose it makes sense," Orman conceded. "But since I am involved in this thing, it would seem to be fairer if time were run on a basis that I was used to. In any case . . . I shall make you beg for mercy before I am through with you. Nothing personal, you understand; my duty, you know."

"It is not permitted to ask anything of you."

"Oh, it is not permitted, eh?" Orman said heatedly. "Well, we'll just see whether you feel like waiting for permission, or whether you'll beg me for mercy."

As he spoke, he jabbed angrily with the pencil. He regretted his action as soon as he did it, but it was too late. The sharp point had gone clear through the insect, gouging an enormous hole in its chest. By the time he realized what he had done, the moth was dead.

The heavy weight of extreme disappointment oppressed his mind, and he sat staring at the carcass of his late subject. After several bitter moments, he tried again to establish contact with the moth; there was the small hope that it might not be really dead. Some insects possessed almost miraculous powers of survival.

Straining to concentrate his thoughts, he called for it to answer him. He called again and again, pausing only to listen in silence for a reply. None came. Furious and tired from the strain of his mental exertions, Orman jabbed viciously at the empty body of the moth, piercing it from head to tail. Realizing the futility of his actions, he regained his self-control and dropped the pencil. As if from a great distance, so dimly that he could not be sure whether he had received a message or imag-

ined it, he heard a thin, mocking laugh. It was a happy laugh, but Orman was not amused.

But there would be another time. The thought helped make up for the terrible disappointment he had just experienced, and he heaved a sigh. Patience had always been one of his chief virtues.

The staff noticed his good humor as he made his way through the office. Once or twice he murmured a "Good morning"—with the result that as he passed through the door to his inner sanctum, he was followed by every pair of eyes in the place. He took his place behind his desk and used the intercom to ask Miss Adams to send Hinkley in to him.

Hinkley knocked and entered. He walked hesitantly across the room and waited in front of Orman's desk. He wore a puzzled expression and was obviously wondering what his boss might want with him.

After several minutes, during which Hinkley shifted weight from foot to foot, not daring to clear his throat for fear that it might be mistaken for a sign of impatience on his part, Orman

looked up from the papers he had been riffling through.

"Ah, Hinkley," he said warmly, "and how are you this morning?"

"Fine, thank you, sir," Hinkley answered.

"Well, that's wonderful." Orman was fairly booming with good spirits. "And Mrs. Hinkley?"

"She's very much the same, sir. No worse, at least. She's leaving for Rochester next Monday."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir. She's quite worried." Hinkley's face betrayed his own anxiety.

"It's very depressing. A woman in her condition should never make a trip like that alone. She should have the best of care." Orman shook his head sadly. The implication was brutal.

Hinkley said nothing. He wondered what Mr. Grayson was planning. He seemed in such a bright mood today that there was even a chance he might have had a change of heart.

"I'm sorry to see," Orman went on, "that you don't show a greater concern. Surely you could have worked things so as to care for this woman, who has stood by your side for so many years, in her hour of need."

"But, Mr. Grayson, the other day you said . . ."

"Hinkley, act like a man," Orman interrupted his protesting employee. "The duty is yours and yours alone. Face up to it, man. Don't blame others for your own shortcomings. And now," he consulted his watch, "I'm afraid I shall be very busy this morning, so I'll be grateful if you will return to your work."

"Yes, sir, certainly," Hinkley replied, as he retreated in confusion.

Orman watched a bewildered, thoroughly upset man leave his office. He sighed. Hinkley wouldn't get much work done today.

The fly, buzzing stupidly at the window, caught his attention. So close to freedom, and seeking it so frantically, it was doomed. Within sight of the clear outdoors, the invisible barrier of glass blocked the way, and it dashed itself repeatedly against the unseen wall. The irony of the fly's predicament amused Orman. That it should be caught so close to, and within sight of, the liberty it desired seemed a cute twist. Tearing a strip of cellophane tape from the dispenser on his desk, he walked over to the window. With one quick, ex-

pert movement, he covered the fly, sticking it to the glass. He left a little hump in the middle, so that the insect was not hurt, but securely imprisoned in its little transparent cage.

Now the buzzing grew louder. Orman stood perfectly still, concentrating, tuning in on the thoughts of the distraught fly. He began to catch the sense of the voice, and sent his own thoughts toward his victim.

"Surprised you, didn't I?"

"I knew it had to happen," the fly answered.

"Yes, I suppose you did. But it was neatly done, wasn't it?"

"It was done."

The simple, unruffled replies were irritating. It was almost as though the fly deliberately refused to admit the skilled generalship which had resulted in its capture. But stubbornness would avail it nothing in this case.

"You pretend not to be impressed, I see. But then maybe you don't know yet who I am."

"I know very well who you are, Orman Grayson. I know you."

"Hah! Not half so well as you will know me. What you know of me so far is only

general—but before I'm through with you, you'll know me in great detail. You will know me not for fifteen minutes, or thirty, but you, my friend, will be with me for days."

"It will be as it is ordered," the fly answered patiently. Apparently it did not intend to be shaken. "And I know you much better than you believe."

"You know me?" Orman was interested. He still did not understand too much about the nature of the system in which he had been appointed to a high position, and he was anxious to discover more about its workings. "How do you know me?"

"I know well your brother Tom."

Orman's heart jumped at the mention of the name. In his excitement, he almost lost contact with the insect, as he fought hard to hold back the torrent of words which threatened to flow from his lips. Breathing hard, he closed his eyes and focused his every thought on maintaining the contact.

"What do you know of Tom?" he asked through his mind. "Where is he? Does he speak of me? What does he say?"

"He was with you not long ago," the fly answered.

"Yes, yes, I know," Orman said eagerly. "It was early this morning, wasn't it? He was in my room, getting coffee ready like he used to. Will I see him again?"

Orman was trembling with excitement. The thought that he might establish contact with Tom himself was more than he could bear.

"You will never see him again."

"What do you mean, I'll never see him again? How do you know? You said he was in my room. Why won't he come again?" he asked angrily.

"The last time you saw him, he came to you, not to make coffee for you, but to complete his atonement. He was in your room as a fly. A blue Z was his mark of identification. You should remember him. You tore him apart."

"You lie! You lie!" Orman shouted. In his rage, he drew back his fist and, rushing forward, threw a wild, roundhouse punch at the fly on the windowpane. The fury which enveloped him prevented him from seeing the wastebasket. He tripped over it, just as he was swinging

around with his entire force behind the punch, and he plunged toward the window.

Hinkley was the first one into the office, attracted by the sound of the crashing glass. He saw the broken window, jagged pieces of glass framing the large hole. Carefully, he stuck his head through the opening and

looked down. Ten stories below, a crowd was gathering about a figure lying broken on the sidewalk.

He drew his head back and turned to face the employees who were coming into the room, chattering, wondering, questioning.

"It's Mr. Grayson," Hinkley said. "He's gone out."

THE END



"Well, I guess I can kiss that rope goodbye."

MOURNERS FOR HIRE

REASONABLE RATES— HOUR OR DAY



MOURNERS FOR HIRE

By ELLIS HART

*Killing his wife didn't outrage
Vernon's sensibilities at all.
And why should it? With pro-
fessionals eager to mourn her
passing—at a price.*

IT HAD been the work of perhaps a minute and a half to kill his wife.

Gordon Vernon stepped back from the edge of the roof, out of the line-of-sight

from the building across the way. Deliberately, he began to puddle the kill-weapon.

The kill-weapon was a small knobbed box. It had cost him ten thousand dol-



lars; and the man who had constructed it had "luckily" been outdrawn in a duel the month before. The box's sole function was the emission of a beam which affected the semicircular canals of the inner ear. The canals which govern the balance of the body. The little box cancelled this function. It was ingenious, and Vernon was thankful he had seen to the duel which had killed the inventor. The man might have wanted to patent the device someday, and that would have been fatal. The only person, as a consequence, who knew of the

existence of the little box, was Gordon Vernon.

And he was destroying it . . . for it had served its sole purpose. It had foolproofedly murdered his wife.

The little box with its protruding dials and thin wire antenna began to slag away into molten nothingness under the controlled heat of his flamer.

He kept the beam on the box, which lay on the plasteel roof of the building, making certain the heat was enough to melt the weapon—but not enough to char the plasteel.

In a few moments the box

had been reduced to a shining, flat wafer of fused metal. The sun's light caught a plane of the surface, and reflected brightly in Vernon's blue eyes.

He holstered the flamer, making certain to set the air-wick in the barrel cleanser to *spray*—cleaning away all evidence that the flamer had been fired.

Then he stooped and picked up the wafer of metal.

He carried it to the opposite side of the building. Scaling it like a plastic plate, he threw it out over the city. He saw it arc down between the towering pastel-tinted buildings and disappear onto a side street. The refuse-mecks would dispose of it in—he looked at his ring-watch—about three-quarters of an hour. Then all evidence would be gone.

The perfect murder had been tastefully committed.

Vernon walked swiftly to the dropshaft and lowered to the seventieth floor of the building. From there he took the seldom-used escalator down the back way, and seven minutes later was on the street.

A crowd had already gathered across the street, in front of his building.

He looked across at the building he had just left, up to where he had stood, and was reassured that no one in his own building could have seen him.

The crowd was deepening. But he didn't join it. Several uniformed Legalizers were forming an arm-locked circle, trying to keep the crowd away. He already knew what was in the center of that throng.

Lisa. Dead from a ninety-six storey fall. Quite dead, and by his hand. But ostensibly dead from an accidental fall. He had committed the perfect murder simply by jamming the balancing faculty of his wife's inner ear.

When the kill-box had negated her sense of balance, she had left her roof-garden luncheon party precipitously. Over the parapet, and down to the street. The giving plastic of the streets was constructed to give ease to walking, but from the height Lisa had fallen, it was as stone-hard as steel.

He walked past the crowd disinterestedly. As a man would, who was returning from work, and had no time for idle street-gawking.

As he passed, a woman turned and called to him almost hysterically. He recog-

nized her as one of the women Lisa had invited to the roof-luncheon. *The old ghoul must have dropped down that shaft like a greased pig to see the mess*, he thought wryly.

"Mr. Vernon! Mr. Vernon! Your wife, your wife! She is—" The woman's face was pastey-white and she seemed to be clogging on her own tongue, yet there was an unnatural gleam in her eyes. *The old bat enjoys the sight of death, I do believe*, Vernon added mentally. The woman couldn't let the rest of her sentence fall, but she had served her purpose.

Vernon let a look of terror and disbelief course across his square, almost-handsome features.

He ran to the crowd and elbowed through.

There in the center, sprawled crazily, messier than he had thought it could possibly be, was Lisa.

It wasn't a very pleasant way to end your little affair, Liz, darling, he thought with finality, *but I've never much cared for unfaithful wives. They seem so tediously melodramatic.*

"My God, what happened!" Gordon Vernon screamed, falling to his knees in the street, burying his face and

hands in the crumpled, bloody shape. Before his view was cut off, he saw the faces of the people.

The crowd breathed tragedy, and condolences for him.

Vernon's flamer clattered in its sheath against the sidewalk as he writhed. No one noticed.

I've got to get that sheath oiled, he thought clearly. *And I'd better hire a Mourner, too.*

It had been a good day. After the brief inquest, and after the coroner had clicked its decision — flashing DEATH BY ACCIDENT on its viewslit—Gordon Vernon had begun his show of sorrow.

It wasn't strictly protocol. He might have simply hired himself a Mourner, and left the chore to him, but Vernon was a cautious man, and laying it on a little heavier could do no harm. It was annoying to have to look woeful about Liz's demise, but he knew it wouldn't last long. Just till those surly members of her family that had attended the inquest were appeased. They were duelers, those Sellmans. They would duel on a moment's provocation, and they were all crack shots. It was easier just to look bereaved,

than to worry whether one of them had been insulted.

It wasn't a bad day at all, and he left the inquest as soon as possible after making arrangements for the funeral. "I have to hire a Mourner, the very best in the city," he told friends, and caught the icy stare of the Sellman family.

They had never liked him. They were certain he had married Liz for her money (and they would have been right, of course) and that he was no good, but there was nothing they could do. There was no suspicion that Liz had committed suicide out of unhappiness; it seemed to be an accident.

But right now his primary concern was hiring a Mourner. Particularly with those duel-crazy Sellmans around. If they thought there was any slightest breach of etiquette on his part, there would be a stand as sure as he lived. He had to find the very best Mourner available.

A good Mourner was important.

Not only because he was too busy to mourn himself, but just because it wasn't *done* any more. The proper thing to do (and the thing to do if you didn't want the

Mourners Guild picketing the funeral) was hire the most expensive one his accounts would allow, and let the black-cloaked Mourner do the job.

It was a sign of being well-to-do, it was the accepted thing to do, and it took the tiresome and time-wasting strain of mourning a lost one from the bereaved.

How in the world they ever got along, getting upset, wasting time, energy and emotion mourning their own dead, before the Guild, is something I'll never understand, Gordon Vernon mused as he flagged a flitcab outside the Courts Building.

"Third level, professional block 88, Building A," he snapped at the flitman, settling back as the cab lifted to its outbound slot in the streams of traffic. *Who should I engage for the funeral?*

It had to be a well-known Mourner, for the Vernons were a well-known family. Both the Vernon and Sellman standards flew in the Titled Family group at the Duelarama. And it had to be one who would do a top-notch job—chest-beating and histrionics if at all possible—because he couldn't take a chance on one of the Sellmans being insulted. If they

thought their little Lisa had been slighted at her own funeral, they would cast the glove for a duel surely. It had to be the finest in the field.

Gordon Vernon had several Mourner friends in his own circle of acquaintances. Should he hire Ralph Moody-Benoit? Ralph had been one of the Mourners engaged for the big War Rally Funeral Pyre in the Duelarama three months before, to raise funds for the Aldebaran War.

No . . . Ralph was too slow building. He started out with a perfectly normal speaking voice, and clapping of hands. And while he personally preferred this more restrained type of mourning, Vernon knew the Sellmans would expect something much more flamboyant. No, tears were slow in coming to Ralph. No, he couldn't chance it with Moody-Benoit.

What about Alistair Chubb? No, too much saccharine for this job. Sincerity, but with high emotional content, and a great deal of semantically-charged hysterics . . . those were the keynotes this time. He *had* to have . . .

"Flitman, change that. I don't want to go to my office. Instead, second level, residen-

tial-office block 14, Building M."

Certainly. Why hadn't he thought of Maurice Silvera before this? Why bother with all the piddlers and three-shot funeral boys when Silvera was a close friend of the family, when he could have the great Silvera mourn at his wife's funeral.

Maurice Silvera, Mo.D. A long-time friend of the Vernons, and acknowledged the top Mourner in the country.

He would draw on their friendship to get Silvera's services. And perhaps lower the rate a bit.

"Is your phone tagged in?" he asked over the partition.

The flitman nodded his head briskly, and Gordon Vernon pulled the receiver from its stikplate, dialed WEchsler 99-2084K. There were a few moments waiting till the machines hooked their beams in connection, and the viewplate turned reflective during that time.

Vernon stared at his reflection in the mirror of the viewplate, and realized he had a good many years ahead of himself. With Lisa out of the way, and with his good looks and determination, there were no heights to which he could not aspire.

His hair was a sandy

brush-cut, with the current stylistic sliver of silver slashing vertically to the widow's peak above his high forehead. His eyes were a deep blue that seemed to pulse when he stared at them too closely. His mouth was firm, and his nose just off-center enough to prevent any hint of femininity. He was, indeed, a good-looking man, and Liz had not been the only woman in the city.

There were eight flashes before Silvera lifted the receiver at his end. The view-plate remained mirrored.

"Good afternoon. I can't see you, would you tag in your view please."

Vernon pressed at the view stud, but the plate remained blank. "Flitman, what's the matter with your view, is it dead?"

The flitman half-turned his head, shrugged his shoulders and replied, "Don't know, mac. This's a replacement flit. Must be bunko. Sorry."

"Maurice, this is Gordon Vernon," he answered brightly, "I'm in a flit, on my way over to your office. The view's out, but it doesn't matter. I just wanted to make certain you were in. Can you spare me a half hour?"

The rich baritone voice of

the Mourner came back clearly. "Why certainly Gordon. Any time. I'm free till six. What do you want, a Vodkatini or straight hi-Scotch?"

"The hi-Scotch'll be fine, Maurice. Have it warmed for me. Be there in ten."

"Fine. See you."

"Pip-ho."

"Pip." And he blanked off.

Vernon re-stuck the receiver and slumped back in the flit-cab's cushions.

It had started out slowly today, but things were moving rather nicely now. He had had to look sorrowful for a while there, which had been an unaccustomed strain, but soon he could dump all that tedious routine work in Silvera's capable hands.

The whole thing had worked out so beautifully, he wondered why hadn't he done it sooner. *If you can't find the man she's been sleeping around with, then you nip the evil at its very source*, he thought, sucking a cigar alight.

Gordon Vernon had known for some time that Liz was cheating on him. But there hadn't been anything he could do. Nor did he *want* to do anything. He had married Liz for her money and her position, and now that he had

them, he was quite willing to let her tramp around to her heart's content. It kept her out of the way effectively, and let him pursue career or other companionship with equal ease.

But then the offers of presidency for Titano-Aluminum had come up, and he knew they would screen much too carefully. Much too carefully to allow his name to be muddied by Liz's ill-timed infidelity. A scandal would puncture any chances for the appointment.

So he had tried to discover them in the act, to let blame fall where it should, and let himself get out from under unbesmirched. He had failed. The man, whoever he was, was being cautious and clever about the clandestine meetings.

When he had confronted Liz with it, she had screamed at him, laughed raucously, thrown things, threatened to give the exposé to the confidentials for publication. That was when he had decided the presidency was more important than the harpie-tramp he had married.

So he had killed her.

And the presidency of Titano-Aluminum was within his very grasp. Just a Mourner, and the funeral (I won't

be able to attend that . . . a preparatory board meeting of T-A . . . more important . . . oh, well, the Mourner usually handles it solo without help from the surviving members of the family, anyhow) and then the screening clearance for the appointment.

He sank into the flitcab's cushions, dragged deeply on his cigar, and smiled at the skyslit of the flitcab.

Somewhere up there, Liz had met her Maker.

There had been a hasty stand on the landing-deck when the flitcab landed. One man accusing another of denting his flit's fender, an argument, and a besmirching of character.

Vernon had paid the flitman and watched interestedly for a few minutes. They both seemed to be inept with their flamers, and he always enjoyed watching a pair of fools make bigger fools of themselves.

He stood at cross-angles to their line of flame, with the rest of the crowd, and watched the two men go through the ritual. The insulted party "cast the glove" by slapping the insulter's face. A red, four-pronged flush appeared on the insulter's face, and he

demanding, "When, where, what weapons?"

The insulted party answered sharply, "Here, now, flamers."

They glared at one another for a moment, back-to-back, and a Legalizer who had arrived shortly after the beginning of the argument paced them off.

"One. Two. Three. Four. Five . . ." he counted off, keeping his eyes steadied to make certain none of the crowd had strayed into the line of flame.

". . . Eight. Nine. Ten." He paused. "Turn!"

Both men spun awkwardly, and the insulted clutched for his sheath. He was an instant too slow, and the insulter's hand slapped fabric, came away with the blued-steel flamer in his palm, and a spray of livid orange flame boiled straight-line for the insulted. But the shot was a hasty one. It grazed the insulted, charring his left shoulder, crackling the fabric of his suit, and tossing the man sidewise.

The insulted had his own weapon out, and the next shot—free and clear—was his. He steadied himself, slapping at the sparks on his suit, and a slow grin came over his face.

Clods, Vernon thought. *They'd both be dead were they dueling the Sellmans or myself.* Then at the realization of the ability he had acknowledged on Liz's family's part, he tensed, and watched the duel more closely, trying to get those damned relatives from his mind.

The insulted brought his flamer up, and the insulter quivered slightly as the gun came to rest on a line with his stomach.

At least the fool knows enough to go for the vitals.

The shot roared from the bell-mouth of the gun, and caught the insulter high in the chest. It had been bad aim, and the man's face was washed by a sheet of flame. He screamed high, and pitched over, the flames licking up and around, charring his skin, burning off his hair. He lay there whimpering for a few seconds, then settled quietly. Following the ritual terms, the insulted was over to him quickly, beating out the flames with his own cape. Then he turned the dead man over, carefully avoiding looking at the ruined face, and extracted the man's ident from his ringwatch. He handed the ident, along with several bills from his own

pouch, to the Legalizer, adding, "If this doesn't cover the cost of Mourner and funeral, have his surviving members ring me at this number." He handed the Legalizer a slip of printed paper and walked away.

As the insulted's flit took off, Vernon sneered in derision. *The clown. The unmitigated clown. Pompous ass, walks away as though he'd really defended his honor. What would he have done if he'd been forced to face a real gun?*

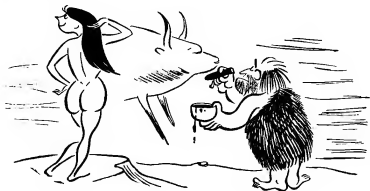
Then abruptly he dragged himself back to the matter at hand. He walked to the dropshaft banks. The dropshaft lowered him to Silvera's corridor, and he found the apartments without difficulty. The door louvred open at his approach. He let the servomeck take his cloak, and

let it unbuckle his gun belt, making certain the flamer was on safety.

Never can be too sure with these servomecks.

Maurice Silvera, professional Mourner, was waiting in the music cubicle. A tape of Delibes *Sylvia* was sending soft harmonies through the room-baffles. The music seemed to be emerging from the air next to Vernon's ear.

Silvera rose to greet his guest. The Mourner was a tall man, at least a full head taller than Vernon, with a high-combed mat of silver-gray hair. His nose was thin and aquiline and his face held breeding. He was a handsome man by any standards, but not superciliously handsome. There was a certain humanity in his appearance, strange to be found in one of his occupation.



He had been Liz Vernon's lover. There was nothing that would reveal hers to Vernon.

Silvera walked smoothly to the room-opening and took Vernon's hand. "Gordon, how nice to see you again. When was the last . . . oh yes, at the bareskin party Liz threw. Marvelous!"

He smiled at Vernon, and the visitor renewed his liking for the tall Mourner. Silvera had been a family friend for several years, though they got together seldom, and Vernon had always enjoyed the man's company. He was not like the other Mourners with their predilection for death and its trappings; there was a certain gaiety to him, and a jocularity of speech that belied his profession.

Abruptly, Vernon remembered this was not a social call. It was a business call, so accordingly, he used the Mourner Ritual:

"Will you mourn in my behalf?" he asked Silvera seriously, using the accepted colloquial form of the ancient Mourner phrases.

Silvera's dark eyes widened momentarily at the words . . .

He had thought this was a pleasure visit. He respond-

ed instantly, however, following the prescribed rune.

"We mourn for anyone."

"Will you convey my heart?"

"We will share your sorrow."

"Will you save my agony?"

"We will shed your tears."

They both sat down, and Vernon continued: "How will you mourn my lost one?"

Silvera answered in tones of utter sincerity, though he must have spoken this formula a thousand times. "With the honor of the dead, with the love and sincerity of the living, with the sorrow of the bereaved, with the glory of the upraised."

He pressed a stud on the tabletop beside his relaxer, and a cigarette came up through a tube, already alight.

He took it, and drew deeply, watching Gordon Vernon carefully, tensing for the answer to his next question.

Vernon asked, "What must I pay for your services?"

"Who has died?" Silvera tensed, hoping.

Vernon licked his lips. "My wife has died."

There was no indication of changing mood on the Mourner's placid face, but he took a sharp stinging drag on the cigarette.

"I'll have to emote you."

Vernon's eyes narrowed . . . this was a departure from the Ritual. "Is that necessary?"

The Mourner spread his hands. "In cases where there is a close tie to the deceased, the only way we can gauge our rates, provide the very best service, is to emote you."

Vernon knew how the Mourners worked. They used their emotion-counter on the bereaved, and gauged exactly how much sorrow he held. If it was substantially lower than what decorum might demand for a widow or widower, the Mourner made up in added effort what the bereaved lacked in reality.

And they charged accordingly.

There didn't seem to be any other way, so Vernon agreed.

Silvera led Gordon from the music cubicle, walking stiffly erect, and they went into the office portion of the Mourner's combined office-home.

He pressed the stud on his deskonsole, and the emoter slid free from its hidden cubicle in the wall. It was a large ball-shaped chair, with a special sensitive pad covering it. The pad was sticky, and adhered to the body of

the subject. It connected itself with the nerve-ends in the body, giving a true reading on the dials and meters set into the control panel.

"Strip," Silvera said.

Gordon Vernon hurriedly shucked his clothing, piling it unceremoniously on the deskonsole. His one-piece suit unstuck in a second, and he removed his jump-boots with equal ease. The insulating layer under his clothing came off next, and he stood naked in the office.

"Sit down, please," Silvera said, adding in a friendly tone, "Gordon."

Vernon slumped into the chair, and instantly he could feel the sticky pad clamp itself to his flesh. It made goose-pimples rise on his skin, but he sat very still, while the machine hummed softly beneath him. In a few moments Silvera slapped him on the shoulder.

"That's it. I've gotten a good reading."

Vernon stood up, the pad unsticking sharply with a vague sucking sound, and redressed. He pulled a fresh cigar from his pouch, and drew it to a red coal at its tip.

"Well, what's the reading?" he inquired curiously.

"Let's go back into the

music room," Silvera suggested lightly. "We can be more comfortable out of this air of business. After all, we *are* friends."

"But . . . business is business," Vernon reminded with a grin.

Silvera's smile was strained, but Vernon did not notice. "Yes, that's right. Business certainly *is* business."

They returned to the music cubicle, and sank back into their relaxers.

"Well . . . ?" Vernon inquired.

"You must pay me standard Mourner rates, plus two hundred dollars an hour overtime."

Vernon sat up abruptly. "What? That's the most exorbitant price I've ever . . ."

Silvera leaned forward, stared intently into Vernon's face. "Gordon, my patient and polite manner extends far outside these walls. What happens in here goes no further. But let's be perfectly frank with one another."

"What do you mean?"

"Gordon, I've been reading emotion-charts for thirteen years now as a licensed and practicing Mo.D. In all that time, I've never seen an emoter reading lower than yours."

"Well . . . what—what does

that signify?" Vernon was nervous now. He twisted the cigar between unsteady fingers.

"It means you aren't sorry Liz is gone."

Vernon's face flushed, and he sputtered. "Why—why that's, that's just ridiculous! Of course I'm sorry Liz is . . . why, I've never heard anything . . . you may be a great Mourner, Silvera, but this is . . ."

Silvera remained calm and steady. "Gordon, I know my business. To handle this funeral, I'd really have to generate, to make up for your total lack of bereavement. That means a considerable drain on my emotion-drugs, a great deal of time and preparation, the hiring of a good sorrowwriter, and a lot of incidentals the average man knows nothing about.

"My price is quite fair, Gordon. If you had a bit more sorrow in you, the price would have been lower." He was finished, and it was obvious that arguing would get nowhere. These Mourners were not fish-peddlers, to be talked down in price. What they said was what they said. And since they had tied up the field with the Guild, what they said, stuck.

It wasn't the usual procedure, and much more than Vernon had considered putting into the funeral, but since he had decided it was safest to throw a *big* funeral for Liz—those belligerent Sellmans would have to be pacified—the total would come close to four thousand dollars. But it would be worth the outrageous fee, if the mourning was done properly.

Vernon agreed inside himself, and reluctantly fell back into the ritual:

"I agree to your terms, Mourner.

"Then mourn for me."

The ritual was concluded, and they settled back in their relaxers. The conversation lost its echo of authority, and settled into a more relaxed—but still tense—tone.

"Look, Maurice," Vernon began, "perhaps I'd better explain about Liz and myself . . ."

Silvera tried to stop him with, "That isn't necessary at all, Gordon. My professional standing doesn't demand a thing, and as a friend of the family, you don't have to tell me unless you want to."

"No, no, I *want* to tell you," Vernon resumed hurriedly, "so you'll understand

why my emoter reading was low."

Silvera listened intently.

"Liz was keeping time with someone else . . . she'd been cheating on me for quite some time now."

Silvera asked carefully, "Have you any idea who the man was?" He waited tightly.

"None," Vernon replied, shaking his head. "But that's why Liz and I weren't close at all, why I have no sorrow at her going. We've been like strangers to one another for over a year." He looked sad, but Silvera knew there was no sorrow in the man.

Silvera looked concerned. "How did she die, Gordon?"

Gordon Vernon looked infinitely sad for a moment, then replied, "She was holding a luncheon party for her club on the roof garden. I was out at the time . . . one of the women at the inquest testified she was carrying a tray past the parapet wall . . . it's very low and ornamental right around the tables there, you know . . . and she screamed and fell over."

"How horrible!"

"Yes, yes, yes," he said with weariness. "Even though she wasn't true, and we had our fights, I'm afraid

I'll miss Liz a great deal. Basically, Maurice, she was a fine woman." *A dirty tramp cheat is more like it*, he added bitterly.

They talked a while longer, Silvera through his pleasant conversation overcoming Vernon's annoyance at the extra-high tariff on his services. Then Vernon begged leave, paid Silvera by scriptocheck, and allowed the door to louver open for him.

"Well, pip-ho, Maurice, and do your very best at the funeral."

"Pip, Gordon. And I certainly will."

Vernon dropshafted up to the roof, where he flagged a flitcab, while down Building M, down in apartments 554-559, Maurice Silvera, Mo.D. was sitting with eyes dark and clouded. He bit the flesh of his fist, till the marks were left there in sharp relief.

Then he rose, carefully tore the scriptocheck into a hundred pieces, and systematically fed the shredded bits of paper to his incinray. Cursing Gordon Vernon for the murder of Liz Vernon . . . the woman he had loved in secret.

And swearing he would even the score with Vernon.

Yes, he would *certainly* do

the best he could at the funeral.

No one would tell Gordon Vernon, for it would be a mark of social inelegance to bring a thing like that to a man's attention. No one would tell him that the Mourner—masked and caped—had done a rotten, a *shameful* job of grieving. No one would tell him of the scene Liz's relatives—the ducl-crazy Sellmans—had made. No one would tell him how they had raved at the Mourners show of no-sorrow, how they had stamped about, and thrown down the bowers of flowers, calling, "Sacrilege! Sacrilege! Duel!" No one would tell him because it was obvious: the Mourner had no personal interest in the funeral. He was merely doing a job, he was merely reflecting the sorrow—by proportion—of the surviving family. If he had done a rotten job, it was obvious the reason was because Gordon himself had no sorrow at Liz's passing.

It was an accepted thing: *When a Mourner did a bad job* (for weren't they impartial and merely hired to do the job of spewing emotions) *it was evident, there had been no sorrow with which to*

work, basically. And no Mourner would falsify his emoting. There had to be a point where they emoted truth.

So the Mourner did a bad, bad job, and the Sellman's guns were out.

No one would tell Gordon Vernon, but he knew something had gone wrong in his scheme. He knew it soon, and suddenly.

"We all knew Liz never shoulda married you, Vernon. All of us knew you were a fortune-hunter. Now she's dead, and you're gonna pay for it!"

The Sellmans had come from Upper Pittsburg, and there was still a Nyork State twang in their voices. They were an unpleasant family, who had gotten rich quickly on ferramino-oxides found on otherwise worthless property they owned. Gordon Vernon had never cared for them, for they had bought their family's prestige, while the Vernon standard had been much-respected for decades.

"But I was nowhere *near* her when she fell, so why are you challenging *me*?"

Rance Sellman, the youngest son, stepped forward. His fame with flamer and jag-knife was written up in all

the cheap Duelist periodicals, and Gordon Vernon prayed deep inside himself that the boy would not offer the challenge as a personal stand. He had seen too many hasty stands, such as the one the other day on Silvera's roof, and he knew he'd never have a chance in a fast-draw contest.

The boy's hand came up and around swiftly, cracking into Vernon's jaw, snapping the man's head around. Tears came to his eyes, and he stared as through a film at the tense-faced Sellman boy. "Vernon, I'm callin' it at you. I'm challengin' you. When, where, what weapons?"

Vernon swallowed, heard himself answering, "The Mall, tomorrow morning at ten . . . flamers."

"And by heaven you *be* there," the boy snapped, turning.

As the Sellmans left, there was the tell-tale hip-movement of the boy that marked an accomplished gunsman, a crack-shot duelist.

Vernon was dead . . . and he knew it.

"Maurice, what happened at the funeral? What happened, Maurice? I've been challenged. The Sellmans want to kill me. What happened, Maurice?"

Vernon's face was a motley of sweat, and his hands shook as they wound in Maurice Silvera's velvet collar.

Silvera brought his hands up sharply, knocking Vernon's clutching fingers away.

"I'm afraid I wasn't very convincing, Vernon, old man. They don't think you regret Liz's death enough. They don't think you're sorrowful enough, so they want to increase your sorrow." A faint tinge of smile gleamed on Silvera's handsome face. "I just wasn't very convincing."

"You weren't *what*? You weren't con . . . you weren't *convincing*? Good Lord, Silvera, I paid you enough!"

"Yes, but you murdered Liz."

Vernon's mouth slid open, and his eyes suddenly glazed over with huntedness. He stammered something unintelligible.

"Yes. Yes, that's right," Silvera answered in a perfectly normal, conversational tone. "I sentenced you to death. Liz and I talked about it many times. She was certain you'd try to kill her if you found out about us."

"You! Then it was . . ."

"That's right, Gordon. That's right."

"You planned it all—"

Silvera was nodding his

head in assent. He was just a moment in time to knock the flamer from Vernon's hand. He slapped Vernon twice, quickly, back and forth, and the sandy-haired man slumped down to a has-sock, his breath beginning to come raggedly, a sob mounting in his chest.

"My God, my God, what will I do . . . what'll I do . . . he'll kill me . . . they'll be watching the areaways, I won't be able to get away . . . he'll burn me down . . . what'll I do . . ."

Silvera smiled down at the murderer, his handsome face washed by unnamed emotions. Then he said something; without waiting for the beginning of the ritual, he said:

"We mourn for anyone . . ."

THE END



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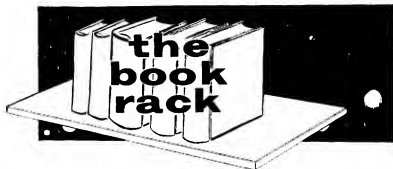
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By VILLIERS GERSON

THE MAN WHO JAPED. *By Philip K. Dick. 160 pp.;*

THE SPACE-BORN. *By E. C. Tubb. 158 pp. Dual Selection of Ace Books. Paper: 35¢.*

In "The Man Who Japed," Philip Dick attempts to delineate a future, post-war world in which the leading force is Morec—for *Moral Reclamation*, the all-encompassing censor, tutor, and law-giver of the warless future world. In this milieu, Allen Purcell, a creative young propagandist, finds himself offered the post of Director of Entertainment and Propaganda, a powerful position whose present job it is to counter the japery of a mysterious scofflaw who has not only cut off the head of the statue of Morec's founder, Major Streiter, but has placed it in an attitude which may do serious damage to the humorless efforts of Morec.

Then Purcell discovers three disturbing facts: first, that he is a sleep-walker; second, that it was he who destroyed the statue; and third, the reason for his japery.

Mr. Dick has a positive talent for fully depicting the physical status of a future world; his extrapolation of psychic and moral components is, however, sketchy. In an effort to enliven a story whose static qualities tend to make interest falter, he has added extraneous action which never quite proves convincing. But "The Man Who Japed" is an interesting effort even though it falls short of the author's previous novels.

In "The Space-Born" E. C. Tubb relates the adventures of colonists aboard a spaceship which for 300 years has been on a voyage to Pollux. In three centuries, Man has lost much of

his knowledge, so that by the time the story opens, the colonists are being compressed between the jaws of an inexorable vise: on the one hand, the demands of eugenics call for carefully selected mating; on the other, the limited facilities of the ship make legalized murder at the age of 40 imperative. Trapped by this dilemma, young Jay West, a legal killer, finds himself loving a girl who cannot be his for eugenic reasons, and then ordered to kill her father.

Mr. Tubb solves his problem with neatness, although a good deal of gory killing goes on before he does so, replete with glimpses of the panting, naked female flesh which seem to be so indispensable to paperbacks these days. But his hypothesis—that the builders and creators of the spaceship and the planned colony should have developed such a life philosophy as Mr. Tubb expounds—is manifestly ridiculous. If you can forget this absurdity, however, you'll find here a rousing tale of adventure among the stars.

THE END OF THE WORLD. Edited by Donald A. Wollheim. 160 pp. Ace Books. Paper: 25¢.

As the title suggests, the six stories contained in this anthology are concerned with the extinction of the Earth. Here also is an object lesson to those who mourn the passing of "the good old days."

Of the six, four—"The Year of the Jackpot," by Robert A. Heinlein; "Last Night of Summer," by Alfred Coppel; Philip K. Dick's "Imposter"; and "Rescue Party," by Arthur C. Clarke—are of the so-called "modern era" of science fiction. The last-named dates from 1946; the rest are products of the '50s. The best—as is, perhaps, to be expected—is the dynamic Heinlein's "Jackpot," yet even this is not without its faults. Despite these, its veracity, its careful construction, and its relentless pace make it a standout. Phil Dick's "Imposter," (like Heinlein's contribution, previously anthologized) is one of his best and gets better with re-reading. Alfred Coppel brings us, in "Summer," a stern yet compassionate story of the ultimate doom which dogs Man psychically as well as physically; and Clarke's "Rescue Party" gives to the rescuing aliens who have come to Earth to help *Homo sapiens* escape his exploding sun the warmth and reality which hitherto have been characteristic of Hal Clement's creations.

The two remaining stories are Amelia Reynolds Long's "Omega" and Edmond Hamilton's "In the World's Dusk." The first is an arty gimmick story, the gimmick of which is mental time travel to the end of time. The second concerns Galos Cann, the last man of one race who sleeps in the City Zor through the millenia until he confronts the last man of a new race.

The "sense of wonder" which these stories supposedly contain is pitifully insufficient if backed by faulty construction and characterization, inept motivation, and a highfalutin' prose designed to cover up the writers' inadequacies.

THE RANGER BOYS IN SPACE. By Hal Clement. 257 pp. L. C. Page & Co. \$2.75.

As most science fiction readers know, Hal Clement can invest an alien life form with interest, reason, and even charm. With this, his first professed juvenile, he tries his hand at the young male *Homo sapiens*—namely Dart and Bart Ranger, teen-age brothers; their friend, Peter Ashburn; their uncle, scientist James Bowen; and Tumble Tighe, the mysterious youngster who starts out as a spy, and ends up a friend.

The first hazard which Man finds in space travel is vertigo; adult humans cannot long endure free-fall without serious effects upon health. But the Ranger boys find that this limitation applies only to the adult; teen-agers are immune, or rather, adapt quickly to the new conditions. In training to become the first space pilots, the two brothers and Peter capture Tumble Tighe when he breaks into their quarters in search of information. Though he will not tell them why he is on his mission of espionage, Tumble becomes one of the party through a rationalization on the author's part which I had difficulty in following. But the Rangers' troubles are not yet over. Tighe steals a rocket and crashes upon the Moon. It is up to the good guys to capture and rescue the little bad guy—which they do quite handily.

Mr. Clement had better stick to his aliens. He is ill-at-ease with human beings, and the story is saved by two factors: first, that in a juvenile, characterization is less important than in novels meant for adults; and second, because fast action and a certain warm naiveté give what promises to be one of a series the story values it needs. Not bad for 10 to 15-year olds.

ACCORDING TO YOU...



BY THE READERS

Dear Editor:

This is simply to tell you just how much I really enjoyed "The Goddess of World 21," by Henry Slesar. I don't think that there's been anything better than that in several past issues.

Ahem! Here's where the trouble starts. I bought the first issue of *Dream World*, and I can truthfully say it'll never be anything like *Amazing* or *Fantastic*.

James W. Ayres
609 First Street
Attalla, Ala.

• *Henry Slesar is at work on a new one for us. As great a story, we feel, as he has ever done. The title is "A God Named Smith." Watch for it.*

Dear Editor:

I'd like to compliment you on your fine feature "Goddess of World 21" in the March issue of *Fantastic*. I believe that stories about giantesses and amazons are the most interesting of all science fiction novels written. Your magazine is the first one to feature one in several years, and I certainly hope they appear more often. In fact, I believe the last time I saw one similar to yours was in the June, 1953, *Fantastic* and it was titled "Worlan's World."

I have one criticism to make in reference to this kind of

story. Why do they always end with the hero and heroine of equal height? Authors either shrink the woman or make a giant out of the male when actually there is no reason for this. An interesting fact I'd like to point out is that in our world, particularly, man is one of the few living species in which the male is larger than the female. During the adolescent growth stage the girls overtake the boys in size, and it isn't until several years later that the boy catches up. Perhaps someday females will take over the superiority of height which we possess today. This is evidenced by the recent growth of many 20th Century girls. When you realize all the six-foot women there are in our country alone, and many others range as high as six-four to six-eight. This tendency of women continuing to grow taller is significant when the average man is only five feet eight, with many males around five-four.

J. L. Robbins
Santa Ana, California

● *You know women are getting so big? It's because us poor little undernourished men are feeding them so well.*

Dear Editor:

The NEWYORCON is past history, but you can still get a copy of the NEWYORCON MEMORY BOOK at \$1.00 a copy. It has 160 pages of mimeograph material, print covers, special plastic binding, fanzine combozine, and a NYCON report by James Taurasi of "Fantasy Times." It will be a collector's item in a short time as only 100 copies were published. Get yours before they are all gone.

K. Martin Carlson
Moorhead, Minn.

● *We didn't know that Jimmy Taurasi, who operates out of New York, had a branch office in Moorhead, Minn.*

Dear Editor:

I have been reading science-fiction for over 35 years. My interests are mostly on the fantastic side. Speaking of fantasy, in my opinion (and I think I rate one, having read over 10,000 books or magazines of that type) the two foremost writers of fantasy are Marie Corelli and A. Merritt. I believe the former

is probably the greatest. Her books such as "The Sorrows of Satan," "Ardath," "The Mighty Atom," "The Tale of Two Worlds," etc., are the kind of fantasy that I never see in literature today. I think you would give your readers the greatest thrill in the world if you could arrange to print "Ardath" or "The Sorrows of Satan" in installments in *Fantastic*.

Everett D. Biddle

Lago Oil & Trans. Co.

Aruba, Netherland Antilles

• *We admit those old stories were great and we mourn the passing of Corelli and Merritt. But great writers are appearing today, in all fields, who will be venerated for classic work in future years.*

Dear Editor:

This is to announce the formation of an exclusive S-F club. Membership will be composed of s-f writers who have not yet reached their 18th birthday. One member will be chosen from each of the 48 states and territories of the United States. The organization will be centered around a fanzine to which each member will contribute.

Applicants are asked to send samples of their works along with a complete report on their activities in s-f. Owners of printing presses are urged to send samples of their skill. This information should be in the mail before the 15th of May. Address applications to:

A. L. Y. S. F. W.

General Delivery

Monticello, Illinois

Dear Editor:

I have just read *Fantastic* for March and I agree with Herman Frye's suggestion in "According to You."

You said you doubted there were enough young writers to keep you supplied. Of course, I realize that not all of the material sent to you would be useable, but have you ever tried for volunteers?

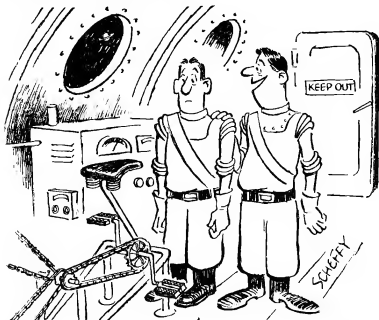
As an amateur writer myself and an avid s-f fan I know I'd like a crack at it. Once the ball was rolling you'd probably be surprised at the response.

Glad to hear you've gone monthly with *Fantastic*. Your cover of "The Goddess of World 21" was very striking.

Are you an s-f fan? If so you must enjoy your work. I know I would. Just think of the stories you read that aren't published.

Mrs. Neuman Richard
6914 Tobias
Van Nuys, Calif.

• *Perhaps there has been some erroneous thinking on this matter of young writers. If a magazine were originated exclusively for them it would be actually highlighting and featuring bad writing and mediocrity and the young writers themselves could easily resent this. After all, markets are open to everyone and any writer who is good enough, or gets good enough, to compete will begin to sell. The only solid advice one can give to a beginner is: Write and submit—rewrite and submit again—until you make the grade.*



"Does this answer your question about the trip back?"

It Sounds Fantastic, But . . .

A 10-pound block of ice survived a fire that destroyed a house in Greenville, S. C.

In Oklahoma, a police car and a private automobile collided. The license of the police car was Nr. 1313, that of the private auto was 1313, too.

The maiden name of the mother of Yvonne Lime, who appears in the hit-movie "The Rainmaker" was Lemon. And to top off this fruit salad, Yvonne's telephone exchange is Citrus.



A Manhattan, Kan., householder told an accident insurance salesman to come back later. As he followed the agent out of the house, he fell on the pavement and broke his leg.

A few minutes after a friend invited Harold Cohen, of Fall River, Mass., out for a cup of coffee, the roof of Cohen's office collapsed. A coffee break in more ways than one.



In Lymanville, R. I., a \$5,000 blaze swept a carnival a few hours after it was to have opened for the local fire department's annual fund-raising drive.



During World War II, Brig.-Gen. Leonard D. Weddington, on duty in the Pacific, hung up his pants on a washline. When he returned he found the garment riddled by 13 bullets from a Japanese sniper.

Thanks to an attacker who shot and wounded him in the kidney, a Los Angeles hotel clerk may have an extended life. Doctors discovered he has cancer and believe they can now arrest the growth.

An Oregon girl, on vacation in California as a reward for not smoking until she had reached 21, tossed a cigarette butt out of the window and started a forest fire.

In New York, a student with the promising name of Ernest N. Devver enrolled for dancing lessons at Arthur Murray's.

(Continued from page 5)

cult and after a two-evening total of about five hours we had "won" \$940.00.

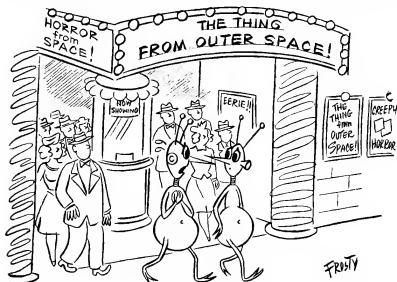
You'd be surprised how annoying this was; doubly so because to all appearances, we could have gone on "winning" until we were ready to fall back on social security.

My frustration lay in the fact that you can't beat a roulette wheel. Geniuses have been trying since the game was invented and barring faulty mechanism or dishonesty in various forms, it can't be done. Yet here is a silly little mathematical gimmick that won for us hour after hour.

So where does this leave me? In the position of knowing that there's a joker in the routine and not being able to find it. And, being a "story man" at heart I find myself projecting a yarn about a gambler who spends his life trying to find the flaw in a gambling system—fails—goes mad and dies—the only millionaire in the mad house.

But seriously, there's a hole in that system somewhere—and I'm going to find it.

—PWF



"Cousin Zork didn't look at all well."

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SWENSON, DISPATCHER, by *R. DeWitt Miller*—The affairs of Acme Interphon-



etry Express are in sad shape when Swenson takes over. Then the dark voids of space crackle with his crisp orders as he barks the powerful competition with his lightning-like maneuvers!

THE CYBER AND JUSTICE HOLMES, by *Frank Riley*—Will electronic machines that unannually weigh legal evidence take the place of living judges on the bench? Here's a provocative story about a human judge who is put on trial, pitted against an infallible mechanical wizard.

—and MORE! See other side for further details

Another scan
by
cape1736

